SIX-SHOOTER STRATEGY—Novel by CLEM YORE

Jan. 20th Twice a Month 15 cents

WEST

BRAD BUCKS THE BORDER

a novelette of the Air Patrol

By Thomson Burtis

Also

Charles Alden Seltzer

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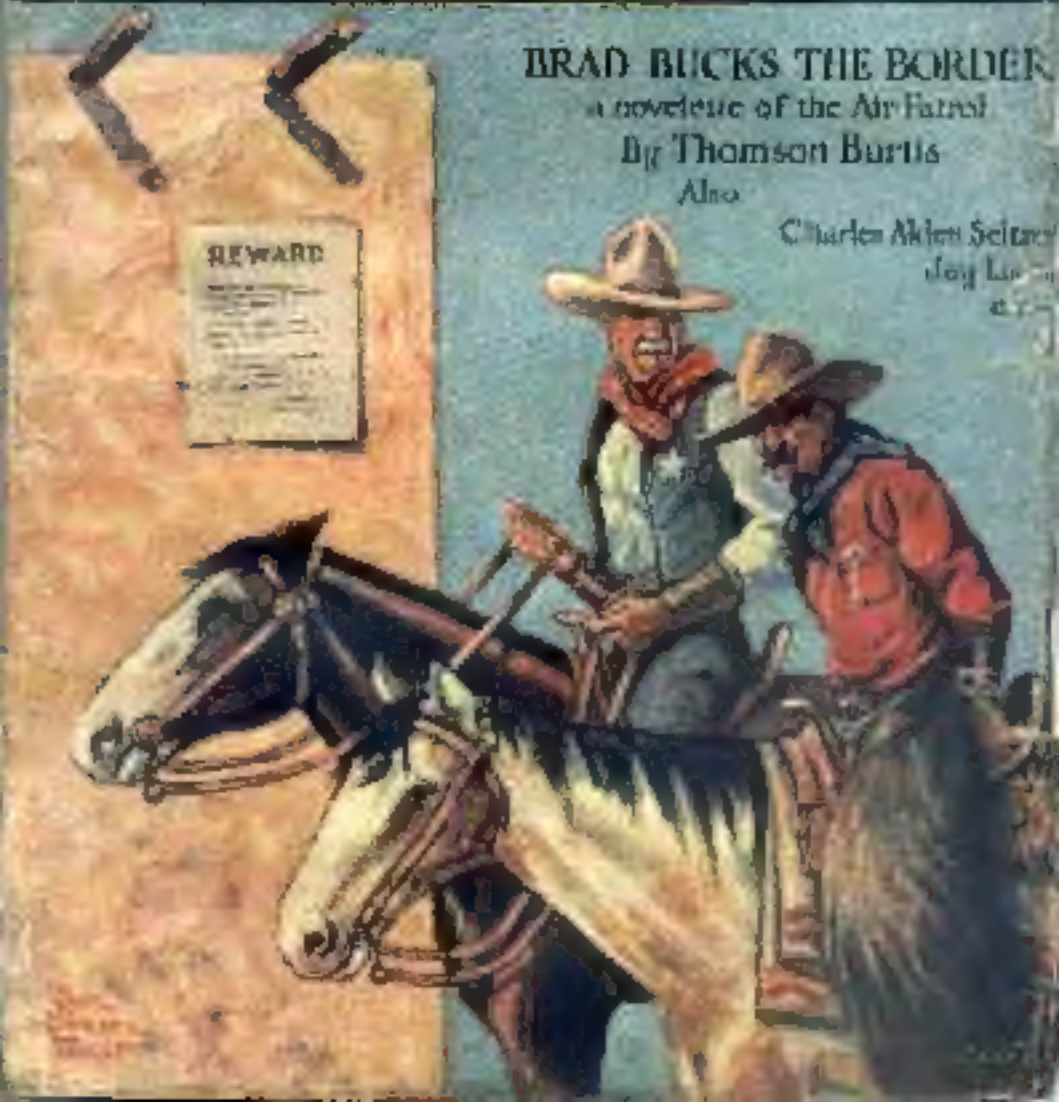

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"EMBARRASSING," BY WILLIAM R. LEIGH

Shorty has to choke leather, jest after braggin' hisself as a buckaroo

Vol. I. No. 2 JANUARY 20, 1926

WEST

HARRY E. MAULE, *Editor* ANTHONY M. RUD, *Assoc. Editor*

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SIX-SHOOTER STRATEGY

Author of "Micky Malone From San Antone," etc.

At ropin' an' ridin' an' throwin' a gun, this Fadeaway Frank was expressive; from Cheyenne to Frio the prizes he won, were not just in dollars, an' not just in fun; but they sure figgered up some impressive!

FADEAWAY came in from the south pasture and went directly to the ranch-house. He had heard something from a neighbor that troubled him sorely, and he decided that for once he'd break in where he hadn't been asked.

Jerry Whitcomb, owner of the Triple Links, was sitting in the side room and he looked for all the world as though his last day had come. Fadeaway Frank spoke directly to him. "Boss," he said, "they was a-tellin' me down at Five Mile that the bank has started to turn the compressed air on this string o' yores. How about it, an' is it true?"

"Yes, Frank, it's true. I must have six thousand by this time next month or they close in on my paper. And at the price of grass cows now, I'll be cleaned out. If I could stick it to spring, maybe——"

"How much can you wiggle under, an' carry away, yoreself?"

"Well, I might raise three thousand—chattel on my household stuff, farm equipment, and so forth."

"Then we shore can make the grade. Here."

Out of an overall pocket Frank pulled a checkbook and wrote a check for three thousand dollars. This he flipped across the table to Whitcomb as he flung the checkbook in the stove.

"I'm entered at Cheyenne in the calf an' steer ropin', the bulldoggin', an' buckin' horse events, an' if I'm a little bit lucky in the night crap games, we'll sure be shoutin'. This afternoon I'll slide down, Cap'n Jerry, an' slip into my rainbow vest an' playin' card boots an' see what I can see that looks like a locomotive headed for Cheyenne. Meantime, you deposit that paper, an' presentin' yore compliments to that same bank tell 'em just where you think they oughta go."

"Frank! Why, I couldn't do this!"

"That's old stuff, Cap'n Jerry—copyright's expired an' duty's way up. Can't do it, huh! You're forgettin' something, ain't you? If I hadn't a-run into you three years ago when they had me jimmed an' jammed on that rustlin' charge, I'd shore be down at Rawlins right now. Nope, I'm seein' nothin' but yore dust, I'm that far behind. An' then that money ain't a-doin' me no good a-layin' in a ornery bank. If I was runnin' ag'in the towns, like ev'ry young fella, maybe, had oughta do, I might be crimped, but I've re-formed an' re-gretted myself. Besides, that money is pretty much what I picked up last year ridin' that relay string of yores at Belle Fourche, Bozeman an' a lotta little honkytonk Nebraska an' Kansas towns. Money—shucks! I'll be sittin' serene if I knows they ain't pinchin' you. An' I wouldn't, none, if they was. This chatter's done. No continuation; no turn to the next page, or as the Mexi-

can says, no *'pasa a la ultima plana.'* We starts buildin' all kinds of Kingdom Come up around the old Triple Links, to see can we beat these tinhorn banks. Now I'm gone, an' good-by!"

"Wait, Frank!" But Fadeaway was out of the room.

And on the way to the bunkhouse in pursuit of Fadeaway, Jerry Whitcomb met a messenger from the Junction bearing a telegram. As the boy rode away from the ranch Jerry called Frank and placed in his hands this wire.

YOU BET I'VE GOT THE MONEY. DRAW ON ME UP TO TEN THOUSAND. HAVE YOU A MAN WHO CAN NOSE AROUND THIS COUNTRY AND HELP ME CLEAN OUT A BAD BUNCH THAT KEEPS MY HANDS SCARED TO DEATH. THREE KILLINGS OF MY BOYS IN FOUR WEEKS. WHEN YOU WIRE BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY.

TOM.

Frank lifted a face filled with smiles and Whitcomb handed him the check he had written but a moment before.

"Did you know about this telegram a-comin' when I give yuh that paper?" Fadeaway asked.

"No. I sent the wire last evening out of sheer desperation. Tom is an old pal of mine; we worked together in California, Sonora, New Mexico and Texas. I thought of him as a last resort, but you know how the cattle business is. I really didn't expect Tom to have any ready money. But about that last part of the wire. I wish you'd make up your mind to go to him."

"You mean——?"

"That I'd appreciate it if you'd turn cowboy-detective and hit for the Frio and help Tom English smoke out that gang. Will you?"

"Cap'n, I was a-figgerin' on dallyin' a little at Cheyenne. But if yuh say——"

"Go to Cheyenne. I figured that all out, and somehow I knew you'd accept; so I sent an answer by that boy telling Tom to meet you in the Plains Hotel, at the writing desk next to the cashier's window, about eight o'clock, day after tomorrow night. You're to wear this." He gave Frank a solid silver scarf holder.

"Cap'n, this yere thing's a part o' yore sinful youth, I bet."

"Never mind, Tom will be looking for it. And he knows all about it. Make what terms you want, but by all means go with him. And you'll never regret it. He runs close to thirty thousand head; works in and out of Texas and Mexico, and his home ranch is a range eighty miles square. There's a big chance for you. A real one!"

"I worked southeast of the Frio, once; lotta country a-layin' out o' doors down there. Maybe I'll like it, but if I don't I'll be sneakin' back here like a hound dog after missin' his rabbit."

"You'll not be coming back! Take it from me, you'll never winter herd in this country again. No more dragging grass with a snowplow to keep the cows from starving; and no more seeing dead calves sticking straight out of the snow and standing on all fours, frozen stiff. Down there it'll be basking in the land where the sunshine spends the winter. And then there'll be soft warm nights, guitars, long rides, and some girl's face to haunt you as you singlefoot the chaparral."

"Cap'n, yuh're pokin' fun at me. Yuh knows well enough, a-plenty, that I ain't no larrupin' lover-man with the wimmin. Why, I'd lose out on a perfect flush of ladies if I was dealt it pat. No, sir, thay's just one kind of trouble I ain't never a-fearin'."

"And what is that?"

"Heartbreak!"

"There's a man for every woman and a woman for every man."

"Yes, sir. An' in ev'ry race ever run, thay was always a also ran. But I got to be on the prod. His name's Tom English, an' he meets me at the Plains, an' recognizes me by this funny lookin' scarf dingus? Is that tally, check?"

"That's it. You take my horse Teddy up to town an' leave him at the livery. Good-by and good luck!"

"I was a-wishin' yuh'd be a-wishin' me good luck at Cheyenne. I'm hopin' to get third money—some place. But they've got a snaky lotta stock, this year. I hear Eddie McCarty has been combin' the Medicine Bow hills and flats, an' has corralled the sassiest of all them wild bunches."

"I'll bet you a hundred you get as good as second in the bucking."

"Now, Cap'n, that's mighty fine of yuh; but how am I to edge by Bob Ask-

ins, Paddy Ryan, them Miles City rock ridin' fools, an' old Johnny Judd an' his flock of fancy twine flingin' hombres in the steer an' calf ropin'. Then, thay's a-goin' to be Lawton Champi, Perli Morris an' some mo' o' them Arizona boys buildin' loops; an' them birds don't snare with nothin' but a two-foot loop an' practices on magpies, jackrabbits an' coyotes. Why, they couldn't miss a calf if they flung the old maguey with their teeth."

"Nevertheless, I believe you're in for a big winning. But beware of the girls on the Frio. And all the way west from there!"

"Doggone!" yelled Fadeaway. "That's the kinda talk, Cap'n! An' with that a-ringin' in my years, I'll be like what the muleskinner said to the walkin' boss, 'Why, we'll quit when the sun goes down.'" He squeezed the ranchman's hand and started on a run for the corral.

TWO days later he met Tom English at Cheyenne and they went at once to the Texan's room, where the details of Frank's work were mapped out for him and plans laid for a meeting at a lonely place fifty miles from the ranchman's home. Here with saddle, pack horse, and supplies, the ranch owner was to meet Fadeaway; and Frank was to scout around the region before showing up at the ranch.

English was intensely impressed with the quiet manner of the young man and decided to remain over in Cheyenne for the show. He wanted to see Fadeaway's ability.

While they talked, with the curtain drawn, but the window raised to the warm night, a slender figure lay on the fire escape—ear cocked at the stone coping of the casement. When Fadeaway walked from the hotel this figure arose and joined two companions in the Capitol Restaurant. He was a boyish looking Mexican and quickly told what he had heard.

"Who's this bird?" asked Ed Munson, a Texas cowboy entered for the bucking contests, but really in town to watch the moves of Tom English.

"Well," said his companion, one Andrews, a Wyoming cowboy whom Munson had sought as soon as he reached Cheyenne, "he's just about the same to ten, as a fifteen is to a dozen. Wait till you see him ride and rope. An' then yuh ain't seen nothin' a-tall! Single-handed that bird busted up Big Kelly's gang over in Brown's Hole. They couldn't get him with a 30-30 an' that's how come his name 'Fadeaway.' Then they jimmed him on a calf killin' charge—planted the hide on his land. Whitcomb got a detective an' they proved so much that before the second trial—for they hung the first jury—all the witnesses sifted outa the country."

"Big Kelly will be wild to get him, eh? He's hell for a grudge."

"Wild? Man, he'd give a right eye to see a spade spankin' dirt over Fadeaway."

"Seems kinda sad to have to put a good hard guy like him away, don't it?"

"Then let's don't! I'd like to see him ride all four days."

"That's all right, too. But I an' you gotta job. Jose, here, an' me, didn't tail English from the Frio to see a good hand make a ride. We had orders to get you an' to keep any bad hombre from comin' down to worry us. This Fadeaway has to go."

"There he comes, now," whispered Andrews.

The Mexican and Munson jerked about and Frank fixed their stare with a cold look as he walked down the floor.

"Let's go," said Andrews. "Didja get that look?"

"What does it mean?"

"Well, he knows me, an' he knows I know Kelly. He adds that, an' carries one. Then he sees that bullfighter riggin' Jose's jumped into, an' didn't miss them fancy Texas clothes o' yores, an' he figgers I'm up to my neck in sin. We gotta keep him from suspectin' us, if we wants to try anything at the grounds tomorrow. Let's get out this alley door!"

When the men walked around the corner Ed Munson caught a face at a window. It was that of Fadeaway. "Man," said the cowboy to Andrews, "he's sure willin' wicked, that boy. An' when riled I'll bet he'll keep a-goin' till sunup. I never seen a more gradin' pair o' lamps in all my life. An' he's got us untangled in his mind, right now. Them eyes! They's a funny sort o' gray, ain't they?"

"I've studied 'bout them things, quite a heap," returned Andrews, "an' yuh

wanta know what I thinks makes him look thataway?"

"What?"

"It's his particular brand of face. It's always so peaceful an' smilin', that when yuh sees him studyin' 'bout something serious, them eyes gets burnin', deep down in 'em, with hell's fire an' brimstone."

"All right! Then we gotta wreck him before he travels south. If he's that bad I ain't a-goin' to lay awake thinkin' 'bout hurtin' a good top hand at the rodeo game. It'll be like slippin' myself a bunch of good luck if we can put him some place where they'll make a hunk of ice act as a pillow for his head."

The men walked away and when Fadeaway left the restaurant he searched all resorts in town looking for them; but he saw no more of them. Then he strolled to his room in the Windsor and sat up with a lot of old-time contest hands telling tales of former days. It was two o'clock when he finally sought bed.

NEVER had there been as large an entry list in the calf roping events as that first afternoon and never was there known such an opening day crowd.

The program began with the maneuvers of the cavalry from Fort Russell and in the last of these, the entire regiment executed the charge. The arena was enveloped in clouds of thick dust and in the midst of it Andrews, Munson and José darted close to Frank; Munson flashed a knife and tried to cut Fadeaway's latigo. But he missed it. Missed it because he wanted to sever only a part, hoping that when Fadeaway tied to a calf there would be a spill and maybe an injury.

An Arizona roper saw the attempt. Later this man rode close to Frank and whispered as he bent his head over his own pommel, "Take a look at yore latigo. I think some guy tried to slice it just now." Then he rode away.

When the boys were being called, and the roping was on, Fadeaway sought the Arizona puncher. "Thanks, old-timer," he said, "he put the blade on it, all right, but only slit the fender. Could you see who did it?"

"I didn't see nothin' but a hat. Not even a hoss, on account uh that dust; but that Stetson is sure Texas. One of them four an' a half inch brim an' seven inch crown beaver babies. I'd know it from the way it was a-wavin' in the dust."

"Uh-huh," said Frank and rode away. He recalled such a hat from the night before, and made up his mind that Tom English had been followed. But seek as he might, no such hat was to be found.

When his time came to rope he looped and busted his calf in a fraction over six seconds and had it all wrapped up and hands in the air in sixteen flat. That brought him day money for the roping.

After supper he sent a description of Munson and José to Tom English by one of his friends, who brought back word that Munson was a Frio tough who had long been suspected of belonging to an international gang of outlaws. Late that night Frank wrote another note and instructed English to take the midnight train for Denver and keep going south till he reached home; and to leave the hotel as secretly as possible in order to keep Munson in the dark. He was now convinced that he, not English, was the object of the Texas cowpuncher's murderous designs.

Nothing developed further during the next two days, except that as he covertly watched the three men, he saw them from time to time in conference. But when either of them would approach his eyes fixed theirs and they moved away.

However, on the last day, after the finals had been ridden in the bucking horse contest, four entrants were tied for first place. The crowd was at a high pitch of excitement, so were the contestants. Frank dropped all thought of the men who had been his greatest concern up to this time. He was out to win first money.

When his turn came to make his re-ride he strolled over to chute number two and he flung his saddle over the top bar of the cage gate. A chute handler reached through the bars and grasped the cinch, and was about to swing it under the bronc's belly when Frank heard a voice say, "I'll help with this mankiller. Go on back to the corral; they're a-wantin' yuh to cut out a bad one for Bobby." At the time Frank thought nothing of it.

But as he was about to drop into the

saddle, and had straddled the chute bars to do so, he saw that Texan style Stetson disappearing. "Who gave me that cinch?" he asked a rider standing nearby. The man indicated Munson, who was walking away. Frank crawled from the chute, walked on the other side of it and saw that his latigo had been cut nearly in two. He pointed it out to the judges, who ordered Munson picked up. But he was nowhere to be found. The surging overflow of the crowd had swallowed him.

When the day was over Fadeaway had won the railroad prize saddle and fifteen hundred dollars in money. That night he settled his hotel bill, boxed and shipped his saddle, strapped on his guns and leaving the hotel through a rear entrance, followed a circuitous course to the railroad yards and hopped a southbound train some distance from the station.

AS THE train pulled out of Uvalde, Texas, Frank dropped off at the end of the yards and walked down the track to a water tank where he saw three dim forms outlined against the smoky blue of the horizon. He smiled as he saw the queer down-necked postures of the ponies. The next instant a low whistle greeted his ear and he walked forward to meet Tom English.

In a rapid narrative he told of the attempt to weaken his cinch and his escape from Munson's surveillance. English gave him a rough, hand drawn map of the country picturing in a homely fashion those essentials to a man who wants to ride a land without being seen; and these were, water holes, pasture, ranches of honest men, and high points where the country could be swept for miles. Then the two walked to the ponies.

"I brought this pony for you to ride," said English. "She's five year old in the spring and smarter'n a whip. I got her from Archie Hunter and I reckon you know what that means. She's gaited and will do 'most anything you tell her. My daughter has ridden her and has trained her to stand still; or to come home alone. She simply ties up the lines around the headstall, and tells her to go home. And I'm telling you that when she's on her way nothing stops her. Once she did forty miles; and covered it in a little less than five hours. She's got lots of real bottom, is an easy feeder, sharp as a tack, and for a trick filly is quicker at a rope than any horse I ever saw. I suppose I'll get shot at sunrise for this, but she's yours. My daughter is visiting some school friends down at Laredo or I couldn't have sneaked Midnight away from the ranch."

"Midnight, eh? Well, little sweetie, I an' yuh ain't a-goin' to be nothin' else but sweethearts. Colonel Tom"—Frank always called his elders by some military title, a Kentucky heritage—"I knows exactly how Archie Hunter trains his gaited stock. In fact I used to wander over that North Park Country, an' so this filly an' me'll get along right nice. Does she kneel an' bow an' do them high school stunts?"

"You'll see as soon as she has been with you a day. If you know Hunter's methods then try them all on Midnight. I brought a pack horse along and a bed roll and some grub. You'll find a carbine in a boot, on that saddle, and a hundred shells in the saddlebags. When will I see you?"

"I've changed my mind about headin' west, right now. I've got a little work to do first. Can you meet me at that big fill, two miles from Nueces, tomorrow night, with about five men?"

"Yes, but——!"

"I may have some raw hombres to deliver over to yuh. Yuh can take 'em down the Nueces River to some o' them west houses o' yourn, can't yuh?"

"Do you mean to make a try for some of these men and keep them prisoners, privately?"

"Yep! If Big Kelly's runnin' this gang he ain't a-doin' it unless he's got a sheriff or two workin' with him. I know that buzzard! An' what's the good of catchin 'fellas an' turnin' 'em over to some peace officer what'll hightail it to Kelly an' put him hep? I believes in usin' thievin' methods with thieves. An' I always hits a man just where he ain't a-lookin' for to be smacked; for I figgers that'll make a Christian outa him faster'n any other way. But I ain't a-tellin' yuh nothin', 'cause if I gets caught, yuh ain't in on the jam, see? When sinful, play solitaire."

"You want me with five men and extra horses, near that big fill tomorrow night. What time?"

"Right around nine. An' bring yore beddin' an' grub. We may have to lay over a day. If she don't work the first time, she shore will the next."

"How many extra horses?"

"Three, at least."

And before the grizzled old rancher could make a reply Frank had loosened the pack horse, turned Midnight around, and stepped into the saddle. *"Adios!"* he cried and set off into the west, heading for the Nueces. Tom English bit his mustache, smiling grimly; then he, too, mounted and rode away.

THE next night, as he and five men were waiting at the end of the fill, they saw the headlight of an approaching train loom into sight and careen along, like a giant firefly, over the flat prairie. As they watched it approach they saw it cease its flickering dance and stare, without appreciable movement, directly at them. Then it dawned on them that the combination local, made up of a baggage car and day coach, was coming to a rapid stop directly on the edge of the fill.

The next instant they saw the engineer and fireman climb from the cab, behind them a tall lithe figure. Tom English chuckled aloud. "There's Fadeaway now," he said, "an' if we ain't watchin' him stick up this train then I ain't sitting on this sand. Lord, that local' just full of some of the quickest gunmen in this state, and maybe a ranger or two! We better slide down and get ready to help that boy."

A conductor and brakeman stepped off the coach and were greeted by a pistol shot; they scrambled back on the platform in ludicrous fashion. And as the brakeman swung onto the steps he saw the standing forms of the six men on the top of the bank silhouetted against the rising moon. As soon as he closed the door of the coach he yelled, "Don't any yuh buckaroos in yere get flossy! Thay's six of them babies watchin' this car from the top of the bank."

The next instant the engineer opened the door, and followed by the fireman, stepped inside. Back of them strode Fadeaway, a bandanna hiding his face, a bone handled Colt in each hand.

Of the six passengers in the coach Frank selected three and ordered them to step into the aisle. The next instant he had pulled a gun from each and tossed it through a window. This done he marched the engineer, fireman, and the three passengers out of the opposite door. Commanding the engine crew to pull away from the spot he walked his prisoners to Tom English and his men; and in remarkably fast time the entire party was mounted and ready to start.

"How did you know, Frank?" asked English.

"I didn't. But I chanced a reckon that when them babies didn't find me the next day they'd be slippin' south. Shucks, this thing's easier'n fillin' a flush. That fella's the Munson yuh wrote me about in that Cheyenne note, ain't he?"

"Yes, and the Mexican is José Medrano from Neuvo Laredo. He has a pretty good name in this country. But who is the third man?"

"Gip Andrews, a Wyomin' puncher who's so crooked he could sleep in a corkscrew without crampin' an' slicker'n a packrat in avoidin' traps. Yuh keep these men under close guard, Colonel English. I'm headin' out west now. I figger on throwin' in with some of these bad hombres, if I can keep Kelly from gettin' a squint at me. I'll see you in two weeks. That horse of mine—boy!"

Fadeaway walked to a mesquite, mounted Midnight and rode directly southwest for the Rio Grande. Tom English and his men pushed their prisoners over the road without wasting time, and by daylight had them secreted in an out of the way corner of his ranch. At noon he had returned to the railroad and telegraphed the chief special agent of the line what he had done. The holdup of the train was a matter of countryside gossip for a few days, but as no effort was put forth by the railroad to apprehend the outlaws, the local sheriff did not attempt to trail the stick-up men.

DURING the next week Fadeaway had ridden a great zigzag course, inspecting the country and getting its lay firmly fixed in his mind. Then, quartering his pack horse with a rancher friend of English near the Rio Grande, he set a course for a ford; and that night saw the lights of the little Mexican town of Victoria

twinkling in the bottom of a narrow gulch.

He boldly rode down the long single street of the village, found a stable, where he put up Midnight; then sauntered uptown and entered a *taberna*.

He was chatting with the American proprietor when the door opened and a crowd of travel stained *vaqueros* entered and went noisily to a table. Other habitués of the place joined these men and soon a rapid fire conversation was progressing which had for its theme the holdup of the train near the west bank of the Nueces. The remarks clearly indicated that some grim uncertainty had come to dwell among the gringos on the other side of the river. No one knew why the train robbers had kidnapped three men from the coach, or what had become of these persons. The gossip ran high. Then of a sudden all eyes centered on the tall form of the American cowpuncher standing before the bar. Here was something to stare at! Who was this fellow?

The leader of the band determined to explore this near at hand mystery. And without the briefest formality he strode toward his subject. "Señor is maybe riding for the Slash Circle Cross?" he offered by way of an opening.

"No," and Fadeaway smiled quizzically into the Mexican's face. "This señor rides for no man. He loves the moonlight, the high trails, an' slants along like a coyote. Too much country to be seen for a real man to spend his time gettin' up an' goin' to sleep on the same ground all the time."

The reply nettled the *vaquero*. "Señor is maybe tryin' to be fonny," he said.

"Nope," replied Frank, *"yuh* gotta grip on that act. But, seein's it's none of my business, what made yuh bust in on me for, anyhow? I thought yuh hombres taught us gringos how to be polite."

Somewhere a laugh struck into the low ceilinged room like a challenge. The *vaquero* winced under the concealed jeer and dropped his eyes to Fadeaway's boots, then lifted them slowly to his face. That glance was clearly ominous. "What you come here for?" he asked coldly.

"Just a-hurryin' across the river. Now looka yere, if yuh wanna get along right well with me, an' also want to find out what yuh can't learn, take me over to that table an' be sociable. Otherwise move away an' don't interfere with a gentleman when he's tryin' to be nice to his own self. Yuh've seen my boots an' hat an' ev'rything that's in between 'em. But yuh don't know what's in my haid; an' I do yores!"

Again the laugh and this time the *vaquero* joined in it. "Is señor a *sortilego*, what you call fortune teller or maybe *aventurero*, a fortune hunter?" The strain of the instant passed.

"No! I'm just a boy what's a-slidin' over yore country a-tryin' to get by an' have a little fun. Will you drink?"

"Si, señor. But my *compañeros;* they are thirsty, too. Today we had a hard ride. A very hard ride. And tomorrow——!"

"Bring 'em up," invited Frank. "Where this money was born there may be more."

During the drink Fadeaway sized up the men around him and stored away an impression of each one. Cards were suggested and during the next hour he was lucky enough to take a few *pesos* out of the game. Then it broke up and the men went their several ways. He put up at the little inn that night and at daylight had breakfast with the innkeeper, who told him somewhat of the caliber of the men he had met the night before.

Fadeaway decided that at least for a day or two he would take the time to nose around that section of the border. After breakfast he went to the stable and was rubbing down Midnight when the leader of the *vaqueros* approached him and stood leaning on a fence with a whimsical smile of banter on his lips. After a brief survey of the American's actions the Mexican said, "You ride a good horse, hombre—and very fast."

"Where I'm makin' a lotta country I like to have a lotta horse under me. An' money ain't nothin' but money, while a horse——!"

"Why bother about money when a man has a rope?"

"You *know* this horse?"

"Who don't? And no money made you the black's rider!"

Frank held the eyes of the Mexican for a fleet fraction of time, then turned on his heel. He passed into the stable and was laying the brush and curry-comb on a studding of the front wall

when the *vaquero's* form darkened the door. Fadeaway changed instantly into a flying demon of fury which engulfed the Mexican and flung him into a stall, and there pressed down his breast with a knee while his long fingers clutched at his slender and swarthy throat. "Yuh've been cross-examinin' me ever since yuh flung a eye on me last night. Who are yuh?"

A FRENZY of anger and fear drained the blood from the man's face; his throat convulsed; his hands made ineffectual efforts to pry open the steely fingers which had gripped him so suddenly and so fiercely. Then Fadeaway released him, jerked him to his feet and hurled him against the side of the barn.

"I'm a-ridin' that horse; an' if yuh know where it belongs yuh keep shet. I know what it means if I'm caught; but I don't figger none on gettin' jammed. Yuh babies better lay off'n me, beginning right now!"

A flush of delight drove back the color to the man's face. It seemed that hidden in the body of Frank's words there was some intangible quality which met a responsive trend in the man's mind. He reached out a hand. A smile had the effect of softening the brutal lines of his thin lips and a warm light of admiration leaped with a sparkle into his eyes.

"*Compañero,*" he said, peaking entirely in Spanish, "I thought as much, but I was not sure. I did but try to prove the look of you. Now, you are my friend. And I have need of a man like thee." The use of the intimate "thee" assured Fadeaway that the man spoke earnestly and out of the sincerity of an overpowering and sudden change of opinion.

Frank replied in the *vaquero's* own speech. "I take it that you are also of the race of men who are hunted by other men on this river. If you are let me know, now. I am not to be played with like a boy at a well."

"Good! I will speak. I am on an errand where I have need for one swift rider and a horse of like kind. Are you willing to go with me and five of my women-men?"

"Talk! I make no reply out of the dark."

"I go down the river where the stage road swings into the land and heads for the east; where there are no houses and many small hills. There, we will wait, till sunup, and meet a stage, carrying a girl."

"A frolic for a piece of silk?" Fadeaway sneered.

"No! More than that!"

"I cross that river no more. Not for a while at least. A man is a fool who gets out of a trap only to step into it the second time."

"But you run no risk. And there is a chance for big money in this affair. An Americano has offered me five thousand *pesos* for this girl. A thousand of this shall be yours."

"No!" Fadeaway withered the man with a sneer.

"Two, then! I must have you!"

"That's better, but make it twenty-five hundred and we will come nearer reaching terms."

"I must have something for my men!"

"You said they were *women*-men. Then pay them a woman's wage. Make them hold the horses and give them a *peso* for the trouble."

"Agreed; the half shall be yours."

"Easy, man, easy. We agree to nothing till I know when and where the money will be paid. I want it before I ride."

"That can't be. I have no money till I deliver the girl; and that will be three days after I take her from the stage."

"Where?" The word snapped in the empty barn like the slamming noise of a door, blown by the wind.

"Many miles into Mexico where the mountains are heavy and high and there are no trails, except to my kind and to the sheep and deer."

"Where, I asked?" Once more Frank's jaws snapped like a trap.

"Sixty miles north and forty west. In a place we call Hell's Hidden Heaven."

"Who is this *Americano?*"

"Have you ever heard of a man by the name of Kelly?"

Fadeaway's turn came to sense the edge of a weakening curiosity. He felt the blood leaving his own cheeks, and to offset an involuntary surrender to this emotion he laughed and stomped a boot out of what appeared to be a sheer excess of delight. "Do you by any chance mean Big Kelly, a giant as men are grown among my people?"

"That is what he is called. You know of him?"

"I was trying my best to get somewhere, where I could meet him. That is one of the reasons I crossed here. They told me, some fellows in Colorado, that he was working a big territory on both sides the river north of Laredo."

"Then in five days, maybe four, you shall be where he now has his headquarters; but he will not be there."

"Why?"

"Because he is in a town to the east on the railroad, and stays there till I have sent him word that the girl is safe. He is like the owl, that man. He goes where he may be seen by big men who can testify that they talked and drank with him on the very day the stage was stopped. What I am about to do will wake these gringos to a fury of madness everywhere. I steal the child of a rich rancher. Then we turn her back across the river when fifty thousand has been paid; and I share in that, in addition to the money I will receive on her delivery. There is a very nice purse for the two of us in this job."

"What is her name?"

"She is the child of Tom English, the owner of the Bar Circle C and is said to be the handsomest woman in Texas. Once in our hands and her father will pay any amount to get her back. But it is for the purpose of making certain rich Mexicans join with him that Kelly wants the girl. It is this, more than the money. Once he can get the backing on this side of the river, he will run his operations for a thousand miles along this border. His connections in New Mexico, Colorado and Wyoming give him a market at fine prices for every cow he ships north. That is why he wants that girl. Her capture will startle Mexico and make him the friends he now lacks."

Fadeaway reached out a hand and grasped that of the man before him. "That's the kind o' play I like. Count me in an' let's get goin'." He dropped his Spanish and spoke rapidly in his wonted manner of expression.

WITHIN an hour Pedro, the leader, Frank, and five Mexicans were winding their way along the Rio Grande, following a dim trail. It wound in and out of the sparse vegetation toward an unused ford of the river, which would allow them to cross almost at the exact point where the attack was planned. Besides an extra pony for each man, a horse was taken along on which to mount the girl.

Shortly before ten o'clock the party arrived at its destination and the men were allotted places in a cover of heavy brush growth, and instructed to protect Frank and their leader in the event of any untoward resistance. Hour after hour went by and then a few shafts of shooting light fled up from the horizon and the zenith of the sky was illumined with faint and delicately shaded lilac hues. Daybreak!

Pedro peered down the long straight road, his eyes contorted into a pucker of tense anxiety. Occasionally his shoulders shook as though with cold, and it seemed to Frank that he was on the point several times of breaking into some manner of hysteria. Not a word passed among the watchers in the brush. Then a dim, small, gray mass, cloudlike in appearance, arose above the tops of the greasewood and chaparral. It moved in a strange and twisting manner and grew larger and larger until, with a casual glance, one would have determined it to be dust.

At this instant the Mexican roused. "You, Jack," he said, using an alias given him by Frank, "you step out when the horses approach and I'll stay here and keep a bead on the driver."

"You want me to take charge of this thing?"

"If you will!" The excitement attendant upon the long vigil had temporarily unmanned Pedro. He quivered as though stricken with the ague.

"All right!" snapped Fadeaway, "but that means just what it says. I take charge and I give the orders. The first one of you hombres that gets rough with this outfit, I'll drop as quick as I would anybody on that bus. Is it agreed?"

"Here they come! Get ready! I give you full authority."

Pedro pulled up his neck scarf till it covered the lower portion of his nose. The other Mexicans followed his example.

"Your mask," shot the Mexican beside Frank, "are you forgetting that?"

"No, I ain't forgettin' nothin', hombre! I'll go into this woman stealin' with my face uncovered an' maybe she'll

take a fancy to me. Anyway, what's the good of a mask if they catches us? An' what will it do to help us get away? I play it bold, an' play it plenty. No shootin' till yuh hear my peacemaker bark."

As the stage tore around a heavy growth, directly at the right of their position, Frank stepped into the road. Leveling both his six-guns he ordered the driver to bring his horses to a stop. The wheelers swung back, and the lead animals halted dead in their tracks as the driver jammed the long brakerod home with a powerful shove.

"Get out in the sand, all yuh cushion hounds," yelled Frank.

No answer!

"Get out, I'm a-tellin' yuh!" he repeated; and he noted that the driver had fixed his form with a cold and calculating stare.

"How many yuh got?" asked Fadeaway.

"Just one," said the driver. "A lady. An' I reckon from the looks of a smart fella like yuh, yuh don't aim none to be botherin' with a woman in this man's country."

"That's just what we're lookin' for. Boys!"

The five Mexicans arose from their covert and at that instant the canvas door of the light vehicle swung out and a trim little figure, dressed in leggings and short skirt and a low necked white waist, jumped to the ground.

With a gun Fadeaway motioned the Mexicans back and strode toward the girl until his face was invisible either to Pedro or any of the other members of the Kelly gang. Then he deliberately and ludicrously winked at the girl and made a manner of grimace which was taken in by the driver. "Ma'am," he said, "I reckon yuh can see I don't hanker much for this sorta pastime; but it's business. Yuh see it's this way. Yuh an' me an' some of my men is about to ride a little. Then we'll be a-sendin' yore daddy word, an' if he's one half as smart as what they say he is, an' then divides that by two, he'll be givin' us something to bring yuh back to him."

"You mean to compell me to follow you?" asked the girl. And Fadeaway gloried in the fact that her rose colored cheeks lost none of their crimson.

"Yuh sure is perfect at understandin' me," he replied; then to the driver, "Tear out, fella, before I start stingin' them broomtails with some of my slugs." The driver touched his leader swith a slap of the lines, released the brake, and in a cloud of dust rolled away.

The girl was placed on a horse and in twenty minutes she and her captors had disappeared from the scene. All day they rode and all day Frank saw no safe opportunity of telling her who he was or what plans lay under the deep tan of his brow. Often the girl would turn in her saddle and pierce his eyes with a deep glance of utter contempt. Once she said to him, as his horse crowded to her side, "How can a self-respecting white man bring himself to the low level that you have reached?"

But he made no reply. When a spur of piñon covered hills loomed a welcome immediately in front of them a short time before the sun went down, Pedro ordered his men to ride ahead and get a meal ready. And when a little later Frank saw a latigo binding loose on the Mexican's rigging, and called his attention to it, Pedro stopped his horse and began to braid a piece of whang leather through the holes in the latigo end. At this opportunity Fadeaway, looking off to the west where the men had ridden ahead, and paying no outward attention to the girl, said to her in a low voice, "I'm the man yore daddy went north to meet. I could have stopped this; but I figgered that if I got into this gang's camp this was my only chance. Nothin' won't happen to yuh, ma'am. Now, don't make out they's been any change. An' don't gimme away by appearin' anxious."

"I won't," she said.

Then he turned and shouted at Pedro. In a short while the Mexican joined him and the trio rode on among the fallen shadows of the scrub timber.

BEFORE the sun arose they were once more on the way. All day they traveled and Fadeaway spent most of his time trotting with the men who formed the advance guard, while Pedro rode beside the pony of the girl.

For two days the same routine was followed, and when the party wound down into a deep ravine and along this to a steep mesa, Petro had to call Frank to guard the girl while he rode ahead to

show the other men the short cut into the rendezvous of the bandits.

When the men galloped from sight Fadeaway turned to the girl and said, "Now, ma'am, I reckon yuh believes me don't you?"

"Of course I do. I knew something was unreal as soon as I saw you give me that wink. And then, when you mounted Midnight! Oh, I was glad to see that little mare! Did you notice how she laid back her ears when she saw and heard me?"

"Yes, an' Pedro saw it, too. Now, Miss English, if yuh thought it the best thing to do, I'd give yuh this filly an' let yuh start over the country to the river; but——"

"I'm going where you go. If you were capable enough for my dad to trust, I can trust you, too. And I do. We'll see this thing through."

"That's mighty nice o' yuh, ma'am! An' I'll shore never do nothin' to make yuh take back them words. If I was a-goin' to do much braggin' about this yere expedition I'd rather like to say that it was yore spunk what made it a success."

"What's your name?"

"Frank," he replied. "They calls me Fadeaway Frank up where yuh can pick snow flowers, an' where Jack Frost plays Dixie, crackin' open the ground."

"Why do they call you Fadeaway?"

"Yuh see it's pretty much like this. They was four boys in our family. One! two! three! four! Just like that. A two-year stretch between any pair was a heap of time. An' when we was all growin' up we had to rustle an' hustle to get what was just our'n. That taught me to be right smart keepin' outa the others' way, an' ma's, too. I raided the cupboard an' got away with it more times than I got hairs. Then along come the cholera an' I was all that was left. I come out this way from my home when I was a little shaver, an' spilled myse'f all over the West. Up in Wyomin' I was workin' for a cattlemen's association an' I had to be mighty scarce when some of them bad babies went a-lookin' for me. After that them boys hung Fadeaway to me an' it stuck. What's yore name, miss?"

"Mary Lee."

"Mary Lee!" he said. "Mary Lee! My gracious, ma'am, that's a right pretty name and I ain't heered it since I left the Cumberland Hills of Harlan County."

"Are you from Kentucky?"

"Yes'm! I was ten year old before I knowed that a Yankee didn't have horns."

"No wonder dad put confidence in you. He simply cottons to anybody or anything that ever came out of Kentucky."

"Was he from there, ma'am?"

"Right from the heart of it. He was born near Danville. So was I."

"Doggone! That explains yore grit. Yuh know, old people down thataway say that a woman from the Danville section is made up part o' nerve, part o' love for horses, and all the rest of beauty."

"Yes, you're from Kentucky, all right!" But nevertheless she thrilled at the reply and felt a bit easier in his company.

They now came to a part of the trail which ran among the loose stones on the very brink of the mesa's steepest side. Far below them appeared the twisting hairpin turns of the descent and along it they saw the men strung out at wide intervals. At last, the foremost rider rounded a sentinel rock and disappeared. The others followed. The boy stared at the girl and she at him. What they had seen looked uncanny. There was no spot where the men could hide; no place for them to disappear. Yet, not a rider was visible. It was as if the earth had opened to receive them.

"Right yere," began Frank, "is where, maybe, yuh better begin to leave us boys; I don't like the looks o' that down there."

"No," she replied, "I'm going through with it. If we are to find out the rendezvous of the gang, this is our time. And, somehow, I feel you will do what daddy needed you for. Look!"

Pedro appeared around the rock as magically as he had vanished and they saw him wave his hat at them. Then down the dangerous path they went and at last stood beside the Mexican. He was smiling and holding back a greasewood clump. Here was the mystery explained!

Behind this was an enormous hole in the rock large enough to admit comfortably a man on horseback. Fadeaway touched Midnight lightly with a spur and the filly stepped gingerly into

the hole. The girl followed, and after them came the Mexican.

THE interior of the rock sloped downward toward a wide, high ceilinged chamber, and here they saw a wan, half fight struggling into the cavelike room from a large exit at its west end. As one frames a window, so Frank stared at the out of doors beyond the opening in the far end of the rock to where he saw green grass and trees and a stream of running water. After a seventy-five-foot passage the three riders came into the light of day.

They had passed under a thin crag ridge, of which the sentinel rock was an outcrop, and were now in a canyon whose walls rose precipitously for several hundred feet on all sides.

Ahead of them were the other men, and after watering the horses they proceeded up the gulch. From time to time Frank peered at odd places, seeking to discover some spot where one could scale the heights above; but always his eyes detected an impassable barrier in the shape of an overhanging ledge. A mile went by and then Petro told Frank he would ride ahead.

As soon as the Mexican was out of earshot Fadeaway turned to Mary Lee. "Right now, I sees that I gotta learn fast how to get outa this place, if I'm a-goin' to bring on yore daddy an' bag the fellas in yere. If I can do that we'll have all the evidence we need as soon's some o' these boys is sayin' 'Good mornin', judge,' somewheres. These hombres will squawk their heads off when they gets in a Texas jail. But that entrance is guarded, always."

"Did you see that man just inside the wall as we came through?"

"Uh-huh. So I reckon I gotta play a little hunch."

"What's that?"

"I'm a-goin' to try an' carry the news to yore dad that we wants fifty thousand for you."

"What!"

"It'll be nervy, I'll say, but that's my hunch. Now if I have to get into a jam an' even though they rough me, don't yuh show no concern. If yuh does——!"

"I understand," she murmured quietly. "I promise you that I won't be interested in you even if they hurt you in front of my eyes."

"I'll try an' get yuh one of my guns."

"I have a derringer in my waist."

"Good! I'll try to leave tonight; for I want yore dad not to worry too much."

"I hope you will for he'll be sick when he hears what that stage driver has to say."

"No'm, he won't."

"Why?"

"Yuh see this?" He pointed to the silver scarf holder.

"Yes."

"When that driver classes my mug an' markin's an' says I wore this thing yore dad'll know that I've throwed in with these fellas; an' he'll be holdin' his boys ready to ride with me when I bobs up over a rise somewhere on his west land."

"But how will dad know that thing?" she asked.

"Jerry Whitcomb wired him in code that I'd be a-wearin' it. Seems like it's a secret between yore dad an' Jerry. Mister Whitcomb always said it brought him good luck. He's wore it for thirty years. Look at it, when I turns my face away. All them scratchin's an' engravin's shore means something."

As Mary Lee peered at the heavy silver bauble and noted how it was etched with a mass of strange and cryptic characters she roused suddenly as Frank said to her in a quick low voice, "They're lookin' at us, right now. Them fellas is all a-tumblin' outa them cabins. Lord, they's a woman! I'm glad o' that! That's her, next to the corner o' that near adobe. An' when yuh look, raise yore eyes an' see particular that face back o' them cabins. I bin a-studyin' that an' seems like if a fella c'u'd get outa this gulch a-tall it'd have to be right there."

Mary Lee turned her eyes carelessly and saw the eroded front of the sheer west wall; but nowhere could she see a place of possible ascent. The trees came to the very edge of the high top and here and there a narrow ledge appeared; but there was a perpendicular face which seemed to belie the hope of Frank's conjecture. It seemed to her that this wall forbade any suggestion of successful climbing; not even a cat could crawl that slippery front.

"No," she murmured, "it isn't likely that anyone could get up that spot."

"But a fella might, somehow, make a try," returned Frank. "Anyway,

yuh watch that place, if they's a window in the shack where they stick yuh. Just keep watchin' that direction an' leave the rest to me. Now keep on as yuh been a-doin', an' don't say nothin' to nobody. Believe in me, will yuh?"

"Believe in you—!" she began; and then a clear firm light entered her eyes, saying more than could her words. Fadeaway knew he had won a great trust, and as they rode forward determination burned fiercely in his soul.

AS SOON as the cabins were reached Mary Lee was escorted by a Mexican youth toward the old woman who stood leaning against an adobe corner. This old creature did not see the girl and did not hear what the youth was saying to her, for at that instant she was holding the face of Frank in an agonized amaze. Her eyes had caught sight of something which had rendered her spellbound. All she could do was stare. Then she roused, nodded at the boy, beamed kindly on Mary Lee, lifted a hand; and smiling in a wan, miserable manner turned away as the girl dogged slowly at her heels toward a cabin which lay almost under the face of the west wall.

As the door closed on this abode the Mexican woman said to Mary Lee in excited Spanish. "That señor, who is he?"

"Do you joke?" returned Mary Lee.

"No! I have never seen him before. Where did he come from?"

"It was he who abducted me and took charge of this band when the stage was stopped. What will your people do with me?"

From down the gulch there came the sounds of a running horse. Nearer and nearer the *clippety clop, clippety clop* of those hurrying hoofs rang through the air. Then the dull mutter of voices was heard; the scurrying of many boots running over the loose earth; the slap of leather and the stampeding about of horses, in a nearby corral. The old woman peered from a barred window. A look of anxiety flecked her face.

"What is it?" asked Mary Lee.

"A courier from Big Kelly. And there is hell on the move now. I will come to you in a little while. In a little while, *mi pobrecita!* These old eyes have seen something about that young *Americano* which tells me that I must be near, to be a help to him. A help to him, and to you. He belongs not to these throat cutting scum. He is a man! A man like——!"

Then she was gone. A latch fell into place outside the door and Mary Lee ran to the window. She saw a dozen or more men quickly changing saddles to fresh horses and loading up sacks with feed and canteens with water.

As she watched, a tall cadaverous looking Mexican and a lean hunchbacked American approached Fadeaway with more than casual interest. They stood watching him as he rubbed down Midnight's gleaming flanks. At last one of them spoke, in response to a nudge from the other.

Fadeaway turned to face them, and Mary's breath caught in her throat as she saw his eyes flash anger at the words of the two men. They talked further; then Frank's arm shot out and jerked the tall Mexican so abruptly that he fell forward on his knees.

What might have happened next she dared not think; but Pedro came running up to the group gesticulating and shouting Spanish in protest. Fadeaway released the Mexican, who arose sullenly, and all four engaged in a discussion, from which only an occasional word came to her. At length Frank shrugged his shoulders and turned his back on them, to resume his task. Pedro walked off with the two still in excited debate to where the others waited. They all mounted and rode away.

What, she wondered, had angered Fadeaway? He was under suspicion, no doubt. What did they plan to do with him?

There came at this instant a rattle at the door and the old woman darted into the room. "Señorita!" she exclaimed. "They say, out there, that Big Kelly is in danger; that a man from the north took three of his men from a train and kept them prisoners in a place on your father's *rancho*. Kelly has sent for more men and a battle will be fought on the other side with your cowboys."

"What was that trouble between the American who brought me here and those other men? I saw it from my window!"

"Gracias á Dios!" cried the old crone. "I know now! He! He! Now, I know! Your very eyes have told me what I wanted to know."

"What is it you say?" ejaculated the girl.

"He is not of this gang! He is like the lion! I saw his eye and I know he is a *man!*"

Mary Lee felt sudden fear assail her heart; she knew that the blood had drained from her cheeks. In one swift query she had told what she had promised Frank would never be divulged. Then she looked at the seamed and leathery face in front of her. Its eyes were aflame with a dancing light; the mouth worked spasmodically; the throat pounded as if a great aneurism were about to burst there.

Then the woman took the girl by the hand. "Now I will be swift," she said. "Those men, all but one, will ride away. Four will be left at the entrance to the canyon; one will remain here, with that American and me, to guard you; and the rest will go to Kelly. Now is my time! I may not succeed; but if I fail I want you to know *this.*"

She pulled Mary Lee toward the window and raised a long bony finger and pointed toward the face of the sheer cliff which was opposite the small opening in the logs. "See that tiny seam which winds zigzag up that wall?"

"Yes."

"That leads to a blind ledge. One may not see it from the floor of this valley, and but two people know it is there. One of these is my boy, the other—" she tapped her own withered breast. "If anything happens to me, get a rope and a horse and go up that trail. It is the only way. A good horse, a fine jumping animal, would be able to leap across a break in that ledge. Such a horse is that black which the *Americano* is rubbing down outside, or that little brown pony there at the far side of the corral; see! That pony would take you across. There is a runway on this end that would give to such an animal the distance to make the jump. Now I go to tell *him.*" She turned her eyes toward the place where Frank and Midnight were to be seen. A Mexican was loitering in the shade of a tree watching the actions of Fadeaway.

The old woman opened the door and after dropping its hasp approached the men. "Where is that boy?" she said to the Mexican.

"He has gone with the others. We three alone are left."

"I want a bucket of water for that girl."

"You know where the spring lies," came the retort.

"I know the mother of thee spawned a cockroach."

Frank laughed and reached out a hand and touched the shoulder of the woman. "In a moment I'll get you a bucket of water," he said.

THE woman faced about and stared into his eyes. Her back was turned to the other man and in her look was a message which Frank read to mean that she desired to be with him, alone.

He acted boldly on the strength of this hunch. "Hombre," he said to the lounging Mexican, "yuh just asked me for a cigarette. Do yuh still want it?"

"*Si!*"

"Get this good woman a bucket of water. I'm busy, here."

The Mexican sauntered toward a bench beside which a row of tin pails was visible and when he had leisurely selected one of these, he disappeared in the direction of the spring.

The old woman burst into a flood of inarticulate speech. Then she calmed.

"Where, where," she murmured, "do you come from?"

"Where the snow is like the grass, señora."

"Where did you get that?" Her voice was now raised; a finger touched the silver scarf holder.

"Why?"

"These old fingers, these fingers, I tell you, *made* that thing many years ago! Many dead years ago. And because a man was kind and good to me, and because—" Her throat contracted she could go no further.

"A real friend gave that to me a while ago, señora."

"For the love of the Virgin do not make sport of an old woman, señor! An old woman who wants to help you because of that little silver token. Are you his son?"

"Whose son?"

"Jerry Whitcomb!"

It was now Frank's time to become amazed. He knew that no one could have known of that gift beyond Whitcomb and English. Yet, here was an old woman whom at the sight of the holder was rendered all but hysterical.

"What does it mean to you?" he asked. "For if you gave it to Whitcomb because you wanted good luck to come to him, I want to tell you that he gave it to me for the same reason. He said it brought luck."

A light welled into her eyes; a hand shot out and touched one of his riding cuffs. Then she spoke quickly. "There, up that trail is a way of escape," she said. "It is a way no man of all these men knows. A horse can go up but will have to jump a wide cleft in the rock. But it can be done and once over, the rider is safe. A horse can go up but it must be a jumper."

Frank lifted his eyes to the face of the cliff and there he saw what appeared to be a sort of slash in the rock. It arose at a ten per cent. grade and upon close scrutiny proved to be a place where a horse might indeed find a manner of footing.

Once more his eyes found the face of the woman at his side and he saw that her agitation had increased and that now she was all a-tremble. A wistful light shone in her eyes. "Señor," she stammered, "I say it who ought not to utter such speech; but I speak of a dead thing; a fine and lovely thing. I speak of love."

"Love?" repeated Fadeaway. "What do you mean?"

"Of Jerry Whitcomb. I loved him, señor; I tell you it was not at that time that I knew it, but for thirty years it has been singing in this old dry heart and it has kept me young. But for it I would have died. I married a cur and loved a—king!"

"Did Mr. Whitcomb——?"

"No!" she snapped the words into the air and they sounded like the pop of a whiplash. "He did not know; he was too great a man for the woman he found in Sonora, when he and I were young. He was, I tell you—" then she stopped, for her eyes caught the form of the Mexican approaching them with a bucket. Staring back at Frank she said, "Tonight, señor, you will take your horse when that scum is asleep and go to the top of this ridge. And then with a sharp turn to your left, and keeping always in the heaviest pine, you will come to a large mesa where the river hills meet your sight. To be seen on the other side of the ridge is to arouse the fiends of the Double Heart *rancho*. They are fiends; they work with Kelly; they guard that side from all spying eyes."

"You know me, señora?" said Frank, looking steadily into her face. "Or why I am here?"

"No, who are you?"

"I am Fadeaway Frank!"

"Whom he spoke of, the man who made you so angry just now?"

"Yes. And I'm the one that took the men from the train, which has got Kelly scared so. And I'm here to round up this gang. If you are a friend of Whitcomb's I'll try and do what I can for you; that is if you help me get the girl in there away from here."

"Señor, I belong not to these men. I came to get my boy, José."

"What José?"

"José Medrano. Our home is in Neuvo Laredo; but this Kelly——"

"He was one of the men I pulled off that train."

"You did not hurt him?"

"No. He is safe, but he is guilty and maybe——"

"It was that Kelly and the *aguardiente, señor!* He is so little!"

Then suddenly her face went gray; the color of fear swept over it. "Ssssh!" she whispered. *"Madre de Dios,* I forgot——!"

"What is wrong, señora?"

"This spot is like an echoing place. If one talks here above a whisper it can be heard at the creek. The sight of you made me forget. This man—" she indicated the man approaching with the filled bucket, "if he has heard us—we are lost. But wait, I will know when he comes near. I will tell from his eye and if he has heard I will tell thee and then thy gun will silence him."

"I'll watch him," assured Fadeaway.

THE man approached. Staring casually into the eyes of the woman he set down the bucket. Frank turned to his horse, threw down a lass rope preparatory to taking out a kink and was just on the point of tightening a latigo when, as the woman stooped to pick up the bucket, the Mexican with a sudden ferocity of movement whipped out his gun and covered Fadeaway. "Step to the head of that horse, hombre," he ordered, "and make no move with those hands. Stick them in the air, high. I heard, down there,

what the two of you had to say."

Frank obeyed. The old woman whirled about; the bucket dropped from her hand. The blood ran from under her cheek tan.

"You," cried the outlaw to the woman, "pull both his guns and drop them to the sand. Quick!"

The wretched old form darted with surprising agility to Frank's side and jerked his guns from their sheaths and dropped both to the ground; then she stood away.

Frank had been trained in the cow game as a tie down man. That is, he always tied his rope through the fork of the saddle and about the horn. Other men, especially those of the plains of Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and California are known as dally boys. "Taking the dallies" means to rope your animal and then swiftly snub the loose end of the lariat about the saddle horn. A tie-down man must be extremely sure of his rigging and the ability of his horse; else calamity, swift and horrible, overtakes him.

Frank's rope was tied to the horn; the loop and several small coils lay in a heap on the earth and close to his feet. As the old woman moved away she saw Fadeaway's boot edge a bit forward, then there came a flash of blue as his overalled leg lifted high in the air. The grotesque and unbelievable action of that long limb seemed to paralyze the old creature; she stood watching what followed as one transfixed with the sight of a numbing horror.

Frank's boot toe lifted the loop of the lass rope and sent it spinning toward the Mexican, who had lowered his gun as he saw Fadeaway's weapons fall. The snakelike form of the maguey settled and snapped around the man's torso like a whip; and simultaneously Fadeaway slapped Midnight, who jerked the Mexican to the earth. Frank whistled and the filly stopped, turned and trotted back to him, dragging the Mexican through the dust. Frank picked up his guns, kicked the Mexican's out of reach, for it had fallen as the filly jumped, then commanded the man to get to his feet.

"Are you a devil?" exclaimed the frightened rustler. "Are you a devil, to rope with a foot?"

"No, but you'll be an angel in a minute if you don't do as I tell you."

Then to the old woman he said, "Señora, will you bring the girl, please? I shall take her with me."

"No, señor!" she wailed, thoroughly frightened. "Not now! Those men guarding the gate of this canyon will be coming back, maybe, and if they found her gone they would kill me; but with you it is different. I have no power over you. You go and bring men to help you. I will be here and will keep the girl safe. But take that man with you! Take him when you go!"

"How, señora?"

"See that brown pony?" she pointed toward the corral. "It is José's, my José's, and it will leap that chasm, up there. Years ago my husband and I found this canyon. We came down that trail. Then we went out through the rock, below us. When my boy was fifteen I brought him here. He knew this spot and loved it. One night in Nuevo Laredo he met Kelly and the next day they came here. It was after that that Kelly began to steal and hide. I knew José had gone bad. So a few months ago I went with him and have been here since that time. If that man will saddle the pony the two of you can ride away. Your black will jump."

An instant only Fadeaway studied the seamed old face staring into his then he said to the Mexican, "Saddle that horse, hombre!" and he indicated the lone pony in the corral. As the man moved away Frank said to the old woman, "I will take this man with me, and have no fear that he will return to cause you grief."

"For the love of the Virgin make sure of your work. If he were to tell what he knows—! These men are devils, señor—devils, I tell you! And to slit a throat is to them like slicing a lemon. And if they found me a traitor my breast would be a pillow for a knife. Please make sure you keep him away!"

"Have no fear. Now, tell me, how do I ride clear of these hills and into the desert country along the river?"

"When you get on top of yonder ridge make this man guide you to the Crow's Nest. He knows the way. But tell him to keep clear of all open places in the trees. If you are seen on this spur your retreat will be cut off. Men are watching in the valley west of us and they have looking glass signals by day and fire signs by night. When you get

into the chaparral on the flats let the sun guide you and travel as a magpie travels, due east."

"Tell her," Frank lifted his face and nodded his head toward the cabin wherein Mary Lee was confined, "that I shall return. And I'll come back as soon as I can. And say to her—" Under the fierce glance of the old woman his eyes fell and a flush of confusion spread over his features.

She smiled and laid a hand on his shoulder. "All old women know, my boy," she said calmly; "we all know. And I understand what you mean. I know what you want to say. And I'll tell her of the look in your eyes, this very minute."

"You know many things, but can you tell what is in a man's heart?" His Spanish was of a peculiar dialect which charmed the old woman.

"One does not have to read the heart when eyes are on fire," she said.

The reply compelled him, as a mask to hide his emotion, to speak of other things. "It is possible," he said, "that I may not get back into this gulch. In that event what word shall I take to Jerry Whitcomb? I wanted to know more about this scarf holder. Tell me."

HER voice as she answered him sounded strangely sweet and young. "When I was a maid there was a man who saved me from a fate of shame. I was in love with him at that time and did not know it. He had done a glorious thing. But I was a fool. I married a swashbuckling cowboy who turned into a pig. Yes, I left that great, fine man with the shadow of a great love falling into my heart and went to the priest with a girl's foolish way and married a man I learned to hate. José is his child. Because that good man did what he did I gave him the thing you wear. It bore a message; it is hidden in it now. And he who has worn it so many years never knew what it meant any more than you do. I wanted to tell him; thought I would come and show him, but when I returned he was gone."

"What does it mean?" asked Frank.

A voice interrupted. "I have saddled the horse. What is you want next?" It was the Mexican who had returned from the corral and now spoke at Fadeaway's side. Frank only stared at the man. He roused as the old woman spoke.

"When you return," she smiled, "and when the days of peace are come to thee and me," she dropped into the affectionate familiar of her race, "then shall I tell you everything. Now go—before it is too late. And have no fear that the pony will not jump, and jump safely. Give him his head and a touch of the spur, that is all."

"Some food, señora, and some grain for my horse," said Frank. "Then I will ask of you the prayers of a good woman for a safe journey."

The old woman shambled into an adobe and came out carrying a sack in which both the horse feed and some food for man had been placed.

"Adios!" smiled Fadeaway as he tied the sack behind his saddle. But when he stood with a foot in the stirrup he spoke quickly as though he had committed a breach of decorum, "You have not told me your name. I want the name of thee, my good woman. I want thy name to know a decent woman in a band of thieves."

She darted to his side and whispered in his ear. "In my veins runs the blood of the Yaqui and in that tongue I am called—'Her Without A Name.'"

"You mean——?"

"Go." She touched him gently and took a step from the horse. "Did I not tell thee that sometime you should know it all?"

"Adios, Her Without—" But she broke in upon his words.

"Tuuscha moo ah! And no man knows what that is. No man but one and he is far, far from here."

She turned abruptly and hurried toward the cabin. As Fadeaway's eyes followed her faltering steps they caught the face of Mary Lee pressed white and troubled against the small pane of the window. Frank raised his Stetson and smiled; then lifted a leg to the saddle and ordered the Mexican to mount and ride ahead. As he started he turned again and waved his hand. In that gesture there was both a salutation and a good-by. It seemed to him that he saw her smile.

Then she disappeared, to reappear as the woman flung open the door before her. "Don't worry," she cried, "I shall not be troubled, for I know you'll come back." One of her arms found lodge-

ment about the waist of the crone. The old woman and the girl seemed to find comfort in each other.

"Thank yuh, ma'am," shouted Frank. His heart leaped at the thought that her words carried more than their outward meaning. Then he added, to cover his confusion bred by such thought, "What'd I say about all yuh Danville ladies?"

Mary Lee smiled and Fadeaway rode off with the warmth of it in his heart.

THE two men reached the slab rock, rode across it and up the steep trail, which was really nothing but an erosion of the rock so deep and wide that its edges had the appearance from below of being but a broken seam of the main cliff. At last they disappeared around a sharp curve and saw immediately before them a wide shelf of more than forty feet in length. Here, at its far end the floor gave way to a sheer drop of more than three hundred feet. Both horses were ridden to the edge of the declivity, where after an examination Frank ordered the Mexican to back away and prepare to make the jump.

The man seemed to wilt and his face assumed all the characteristics of a numbing fear. The brown pony, too, began to exhibit signs of anxiety to be about the back trail. But Frank took the little beast by its bridle and led it some thirty feet away from the abyss, where it reared, plunged and swung about in a frantic manner. The Mexican had great difficulty keeping his seat, so severe were the tossings of the strange little animal.

But at last the pony seemed to gain courage, and it stood trembling but satisfied. "Stick them spurs into her," said Frank then to the Mexican, "and remember I'm on this side watching you light. Stay till I join you. I won't tell you the second time—if you break I drop you." He pulled Midnight aside and watched the Mexican make the leap of the chasm in a fine flying jump.

Then he moved his horse back to the edge of the turn to get all the run he could; and as he looked into the valley he saw Mary Lee staring up. She waved a hand. He answered, and whirling Midnight, tore at the jump on the dead run, lifted the mare and made a pretty vault. They cleared the hole by three feet and trotted alongside the waiting pony.

After directing his man to select a course which could not be seen from the ranches of the valley, Fadeaway moved off a few feet in the rear of the other rider, and in this position they reached the top of the hogback. The cool shade and thick silence of the forest on the crest of the spur was a revelation to Frank. As he rode he made a careful study of tree growth and rock formation. He knew, with the certitude of his kind, that within a few days at most he would have to travel that way once more and that he would ride alone. Then he noted the Mexican.

The fright of the man, head down, shoulders bowed, hips slunk, made of his figure a pitiable sight. Clearly, he evinced a despair that bordered on collapse. Frequently he stole a furtive glance at Frank's face out of the tail of an eye. He tried to speak but the words would not come.

When the edge of the pine had been reached, and the flat vegetation entered, and there was no danger of being seen by the ranchers of the valley he spoke uncertainly. "Out there, señor, out there in the heat there is no water. If you leave me there may I have the canteen? I will head south, for I cannot go back, now."

"Out there," answered Frank, "there is a place where Pedro and that lath of a Mexican and that gringo with a hump have placed horses in a corral. I heard them say as much in your presence. There is where you ride, and after that my rope will get you a larger horse. You go east, not south."

"You do not mean to feed me to the buzzards?"

In the eyes of the man there dwelt the fire of a delighted child. He seemed to revive at once. His face glowed; his step became fresh; his languor vanished. Hope had set him free.

"No, I have a work for you to do. A tale for you to tell in the courts of Texas. There will be many of you there and if you speak the truth you will be allowed to live; but if you lie——"

"Against Kelly! You want me to talk against Kelly?"

"Yes. You will tell of the killings Kelly has ordered done for the last year. You know of these? The English cowboys?"

"It were better that you killed me now. I would not be allowed to speak against this Kelly. I would not live so long."

"That will not come to pass. Kelly will be tamed like a diamondback is tamed when you draw its fangs. You boys are the poison of Kelly and when you talk it kills the thing that has used it as a weapon."

"We have twenty miles to go if you mean to come to that corral. I speak no more of Kelly."

"In case of a trap I use no gun. Listen well to that. In a little while you will wear my rope and lead me to that place where I may see the bars and what is back of them. If all is well, you ride across the river. If not—if there are friends there, then you will be dragged for a mile and left for the lean old birds of the air."

"I make no trouble for you—*fantasma!*"

"All right," laughed Fadeaway, "edge into that pear patch and pick a trail through the heaviest growth."

LATE that night they came upon a large mesa at the end of which, in a small box canyon, where there was a semblance of feed and a little water hole, Frank saw a score of ponies. After reconnoitering the spot and assuring himself that no men had been left to guard the horses, he gave his captive one of his ropes and ordered him to bring out a horse. When the man had roped an animal Frank made him change the saddle from the pony and place it on the fresh horse. Then the two men quickly pulled down the pole bars and drove the fenced ponies into the mesquite; then he placed his captive before him and rode toward the Rio Grande. This he crossed at daylight and before seven o'clock had arrived at the lonely ranch where he had quartered his pack horse.

At this place he left his prisoner and Midnight, and borrowing a fresh mount proceeded without rest and at a rapid pace toward a roundup camp of the Bar Circle C. He arrived at eleven that night and went at once into a conference with Tom English and his foreman.

The first thing the old rancher said to him was, "Well, they've escaped!"

"I figgered as much," replied Frank, "an' right now they're with Big Kelly."

Then swiftly he told of the courier Kelly had sent and the tale he had carried. When his narrative was complete, down to the last detail of the stage holdup and his doings in Hell's Hidden Heaven, and Tom English had been quieted of immediate fear for his daughter's safety, Fadeaway suddenly amazed both men by saying, "They's a rotten apple in yore barrel, Colonel!"

"You mean that one of my own men is working for Kelly?"

"Exactly. Lissen—right after I arrived in that place, and just before them hombres was a-gettin' ready to ride across the river, a big sliver built Mex come up to me, an' with him was a back twisted Yankee; an' them two babies begin to give me the two times two makes five an' wantin' to know how come I'm ridin' into that-air place. From the line o' talk that Mex pulled, I seed he knows something. Then I says, 'What makes yuh think I'm a Bar Circle C hand come in yere to double-cross this outfit?' An' he shoots right back, 'By a Kelly hand we got with the English cows—the description o' this Wyomin' Fadeaway matches a hombre about like yuh, patch for patch.'"

"What did you do then?" asked Tom English.

"I reaches out, grabs his gullet an' was about readly to kick that insinuation outa his hide when Pedro runs up an' tells 'em whatta kind o' fools they both is. Anyhow, that makes 'em all decide to leave me behind. That's what I calls luck, plumb, an' that's why I say some one o' yore boys is so twisted up with Kelly's men that I don't see how yuh're a-goin' to ride back with me a-tall. I won't go into a jam like what's a-waitin' us with no hand what ain't just altogether twenty-four carat, all ways."

The foreman looked at the rancher. Consternation filled both faces before Fadeaway.

"How did these Kelly men get outa yore pen?" Frank asked.

"That's what we don't know. The door was open and three horses missing when the boys fell out of the bunkhouse, about a week ago.

"Where are all the hands now?"

"Over on the number four feed grounds, but they'll be in tomorrow."

"Where they from, most of 'em?"

"Texas and New Mexico, the whole lot," replied the foreman.

"Now, gentlemen," said Fadeaway with a sudden yawn, "if they's no objection I'm a-goin' to build myself a wide old loop o' shore 'nuff sleep. Soon's them hands gets in I wanna take a slant over their riggin' afore they sticks it away."

He flopped on a bunk and began pulling off his boots. The foreman rose and walked out of the door and as Tom English stood to his feet Frank motioned to him.

"What is it, boy?" asked the old man.

"Don't yuh go for to worry no mo' about that little gal o' yores. She's just about thirteen to the dozen when it comes to grit an' sand. An' suh, if yuh'll allow me to say so, I wants to mutter that when God made her, he made a woman who's wuth any ten men in Texas!"

The rancher laughed softly and his eyes warmed at the tribute of the cowboy. "Nobody knows that any better than I do, Fadeaway. Since her mother's death that child has been just about everything to me. But—" here he looked oddly at the face peering out of the bunk into his own—"don't you go and fall in love with her, son. She has been the bane of all the men in this section of Texas. A queer girl and one who loves a man but not a lover. Why, she has turned down more fine offers in the last two years than most girls receive in ten. Don't lose your head, my boy, don't lose your head—for if you'll take my advice you won't believe a thing she looks like, she *feels*."

"Doggone, Colonel," laughed Fadeaway, "I wasn't a-wishin' no trouble on myse'f. I was only a-sayin' to yuh sorta private-like that I ain't seen but a dozen women like her in my life an' she's the whole twelve wrapped up an' ready to carry home. Now, let me sleep."

ALL too soon his rest was disturbed, and when he awoke the foreman stood over him shaking his shoulder. "Come on in to breakfast. The boys are coming over the south rim and will be here inside an hour."

After breakfast Fadeaway selected a spot near the water trough where each of the men would ride as they came into the camp. Here he sat and casually talked with Tom English as the boys watered their ponies and stuck them away in the corral.

A tall rangy looking hand, sitting with one leg dangling about his saddle horn was among the last to edge to the trough and on his figure Frank turned a particular scrutiny. When the fellow dismounted, and was unhooking his latigo and removing the saddle, Fadeaway stood to one side and watched him carefully.

He made no comment at the time, but when the men walked into the cookhouse for breakfast Frank sought the foreman and English. "I've spotted the baby that sprung Munson, the Mex an' Andrews," he said. "Now, don't say a word, but I'm a-goin' to rough him up a little an' make him talk. Yuh get pre-pared to do perzactly what I say. If, for instance, I wants a man hung, yuh fellas both sing out which natural gallows yuh wants the job stitched on. Does yuh get me?"

"Do you really mean that?" asked Tom English.

"Mean it, o' co'se I means it. Introduce me to that slim boy what I dropped my eyes on last an' I'll prove to yuh that he ain't more'n a year away from Chinook talk an' the Kootenai; an' what's more, that he's as yellow as he is lean an' long."

As the men filed out of the dining-room, the foreman motioned to the man Frank wanted to meet. "Slim Meeks," he said, "this is Fadeaway Frank."

"Howdy," grunted Meeks.

"How," said Fadeaway. "Seems like I seen yuh someplace where the snow flickers. Does yuh recall whereat it mighta bin?"

"North o' Santa Fé, maybe. Or 'round about Tucumcari. I worked for the Spear M up thataway."

"Nope," said Frank, "further'n that. Seems like it was up where the salmon's a-rottin' in the sun an' some outfits used to use it for fertilizer. Ever been up anywhere's thataway, *kultus*?"

A quick answer of denial came from Meeks, but the use of the word *kultus*, of very uncomplimentary meaning throughout the Northwest, left a glow in his cheeks and a dull and growing glimmer in his eye. He wanted to show resentment but decided to play safe.

"I got the rottenest memory for them

sorta things, anyhow," continued Fadeaway with a peculiar intonation, and he moved away toward his horse. He saddled, shook out one of the two ropes he carried, just as though he intended to stretch it before looping once more to the front roll of his saddle. Then he mounted.

All the men, now grouped about the harness shed in various positions and at odd tasks, seemed to sense that the episode of the introduction was not as yet quite complete. The very air was charged with some unfinished enterprise, with a sort of sullen foreboding.

"Seems like," spoke up Slim Meeks, "the more I bin a-thinkin' about it, that yuh a-callin' me *kultus* was kinda provokin' queer. If I remembers hearin' a fella explain that word it means right bad in Injun talk, somewheres in Washington an' Oregon."

The man was sitting down, one boot hung over a knee; a hand was hooked, thumb in gun belt, and the other played with the heel of the upraised boot. That entire posture was a sharply defined gesture of studied unconcern. But Frank, as he suddenly stared into the man's face, recalled where he had seen it last. With that revelation a desperate resolve came into his mind. Here was his chance, he mused, to demonstrate once and for all his cowboy efficiency to all the other men. If he was to rouse them this was his opportunity.

His rope lay out before him. One end—that immediately before Slim Meeks—was formed into a small irregular loop. The honda, a hogue's handy, braided and built around the brass by Frank, now lay away from Slim. A loop, about fourteen inches wide and half that deep, lay on the sand. The rest of the lariat was twisted along the earth in a serpentine fashion and reached thirty feet.

Fadeaway, keeping his eyes on the fingers which Slim had slipped close to his gun, and smiling directly at the man, reached down as though to draw in and coil his loose rope. And as his finger touched it he gave a sort of wavy motion, which sent a rapid swell to the end. With a curiously quick side flop he spun the lariat out and in. That movement resembled the action one gives to a whip. The loop, on the ground, described a quick upreaching fling and before anyone saw where it was settling it had pinned Slim's hand and leg in its folds and Midnight was trotting away with the bouncing Meeks following behind.

THE surprise of the other men was evidenced in an audible and spasmodic exhaust of breath. The feat had stupefied them.

When some forty or fifty feet from the scene of the roping Fadeaway turned in the saddle and stopped his horse. "Some o' yuh hombres come on over," he said, "an' slip that rope around this bird's neck. Here's the toad that released them Kelly boys. An' he's the fella what's been responsible for all these killin's of Bar Circle C hands. Lay flat, fella, or I'll make yuh so porous that if they was to fling yore body in the Nueces yuh'd raise that crick a plumb foot."

Meek had attempted to turn on his side to uncover his gun, but at the command of Fadeaway the man dropped his face on an outstretched arm. The foreman, English, and several hands ran forward.

"Pick him up," shouted Frank, "and pull down his shirt till I get a look at his left shoulder blade."

Rough hands tore open the man's shirt. A great blue scar was visible just below the shoulder line. "He got that one July in Miles City, Montana, boys. Got it when he was a-runnin' out a stable door after dopin' a horse that a fella was about to ride relay on. A stable boy tossed a forty-four into him an' then danced a livery stable chambermaid's polka up and down his left leg with a pitchfork when he tried to start smokin' things with his gun. His left leg just below the knee oughta show some of them prods."

Hands pulled off a boot and rolled up an overall leg. Several jagged scars were evident.

During these proceedings Slim made no sign. He was disarmed, stood upon his feet; and then before anyone could move to prevent him he had darted through the crowd. But Frank's loop, which had been removed, flew over the heads of the boys and settled with a sickening swish about the running man's middle. Slim hit the dirt fast.

"Which tree?" yelled Fadeaway. "Let's make this party due and formal —an' speedy, as well. We oughta be

on the prod right now. Which tree, Colonel?"

"That one near the spring house," sang out the rancher; so Fadeaway hurried his catch toward a short stumpy cottonwood whose first limb reached out scarcely ten feet from the earth. Before the tree was gained Slim Meeks had turned Christian.

"Wait!" he screamed, "I'm worth a lot to yuh boys, livin'—an' not two bits dead. I gotta heap on my chest."

"Thata old-timer," laughed Frank. "Crowd up all yuh cowmen an' take heed o' this sinner's misspent life. Talk, Slim, an' let it be narrow gauge, straight iron language. Where is them fellas yuh turned loose?"

"They oughta be in Uvalde or maybe somewheres close by. They was to meet Kelly there and tell him what was the news."

"Yuh turned em out, didn't yuh?"

"Yep. I bin scoutin' for Kelly for seven months."

"Kelly brought yuh down from Montana, didn't he?"

"Yuh said it, Fadeaway," grinned Meeks, "how'd yuh know I was from Washington? I told these babies I never worked north of the San Juan Basin."

"When I seen yuh ride up with that old Miles City riggin' on yore leather split-ear heads, an' that old frosty bosal over that broomtail's nose; an' when I seen yuh bend up a fender an' unhook that latigo outa that old flat riggin' hamley plate I knowed where yuh got that three-quarter rig habit. Down in this man's country them sorta things looks strange to me. Boy, when yuh drags that plunder around thay's only one o' six sorta things yuh is—a neighbor's beef eatin' nester, a real cow thief, a dude wrangler, out for a vacation, a stock detective, a good boy in wrong somewheres an' tryin' to hit the sunshine where it won't spill on them as knows him, or a rootin' tootin' black powder damn' fool. Then yuh winds up a forty foot stretch of silk manila three-eighths hemp an' hooks it, tied top an' bottom, to yore front roll, on the left side yore horn, an' yuh calls that a lass-rope in a country where ev'ry man's a-slingin' them surefire stingy little old maguey ropes. Why, Slim, the frost ain't outa that twine yuh bin braidin' 'round theseyere long horns! But when I seed yore face right well, then I know yuh an' Andrews used to open each other's mail in an' around Chugwater, Cheyenne, Boseman, Fort Collins, Julesburg an' even over on the Yampa."

"That's a-plenty, Frank. Yuh got me graded an' now lead yore ace. If I is hoisted on that twine o' yores, yuh sure silences a lot of gossip I might spill." Slim spoke slowly and gamely. The very words seemed denuded of all subterfuge or attempt at evasion.

The foreman stepped to Frank's stirrup. "Boys," he cried, addressing the fifteen or twenty hands clustered about the scene, "what'll it be? A chance for this skunk to tell us a earful or something slim and black hangin' ag'in the sky?"

A mutter ran through the crowd.

"Men," Tom English said, "Frank here has just escaped from a hole west of the river called Hell's Hidden Heaven, and in that place my daughter Mary Lee is held a prisoner. Four men are guarding the entrance. Last night Fadeaway told us how this man, or one of our boys, was working for Kelly. Frank refused to ride into a fight with Kelly's gang till he had spotted this rotten apple, as he called him. Now that we have him I'm in favor of stringing him up unless he talks and talks quick. What's the verdict?"

"Hook that line over that limb—I'll jerk him to hell!" a voice shouted.

"Let him dance on the atmosphere!" yelled another.

"If we're a-goin' to ride after Miss Mary Lee," said a third, "don't let's be a-gawkin' at a necktie party too long. Why, over on the Hondo, one time, I seen five polished off quicker'n this—an' we had prayers, too!"

Slim wilted. "Boys," he cried, "boys!"

FADEAWAY had unhooked his tie from the horn and was about to hand it to a top hand by the name of Jossey when Slim screeched, "Men, don't pull me up there. I'm worth a thousand dollars at Wenatchee for arson an' crop destroyin'! I set fire to a man's wheat field an' his barns—an' more'n that I can tell yuh how yuh can corral all of Kelly's men."

"How?" yelled Frank.

"I was to set three fires tonight from the big ridge back of the waterhole in

the southwest corner of the upper fenced pasture. That was to tell Kelly an' his gang to meet me tomorrow afternoon, sometime, on the east shore of the Nueces where it makes a letter S bend before headin' this way for this outfit. I was to lead yuh boys into a ambush. Now, if I gets a chance to go north in irons I'll light them fires, an' yuh can get them rustlers."

"What kinda fires?" asked Frank.

"Yakima night signals. Yuh bin at Fort Simcoe, Frank, an' yuh knows 'em an' can read 'em right. Let me go an' I'll show yuh where to look for the answer that tells that I've been seen by Kelly's gang. Is it a bet?"

"Lose a whole day?" someone shouted.

"Whoa!" cried Fadeaway. "We won't be losin' no day. If this baby is singin' gospel, an' I think he is, for he's heard the squeak of hell's front gate, an' smelled the judgment fire—then I for one is in favor of loadin' him onto a train with a Oregon boot an' takin' him to El Paso for to see how good that reward money is. One o' yuh babies is enough to keep him gentle in such a rig. The rest o' us can start smokin' out an' stampedin' Kelly an' then on to bring Miss Mary Lee back where she can get a change o' clothes. Let's listen, boys! Ain't I right?"

"Yuh might be talkin' politics, an' good politics," growled a big puncher called Tubby Hodgins, "but it shore ain't religion to let a backslider like him get so far on the road to Kingdom Come without givin' him a helpin' hand the rest o' the way. I c'u'd just cry, sometimes, when I thinks how damned heathenish this country's gettin'."

"An' to think he was a-teachin' me how to play Lead Kindly Light on the mouth orgah," interjected another boy.

"That oughta teach yuh something, too, Shorty," advised a companion. "Yuh an' Slim was always a-smokin' town boy cigarettes. From now on, son, roll yore own, an' yuh'll own yore own roll. I always said that if a man smoked ready made cigarettes long enough he'd be a-breedin' a lotta cows fast an' a lass rope would be the mother of every single one."

With that the strain of repartee grew stronger and stronger. The sour faces wreathed in smiles, the tension slacked, and Frank led his man back to a shed and flung him inside and closed the door.

That night in company with English and four other men Fadeaway escorted Slim to the high point of the ridge where the fires were started at once; then extinguished. Twice more the flames soared and were put out after a brief duration. Then far to the north and west there twinkled a series of ruby sparks. Answering flames had punctuated the night and these were read by Fadeaway, aloud.

"Agreed! We will be there!"

"Wait!" yelled Slim, "they'll send the exact hour, next!"

Then across the dry land of west Texas there sparkled three long thin flecks of fire; three slim fingers of tiny flame that faded and glowed close down where horizon stars twinkled on the rim of the world.

"Three o'clock, Colonel," read Frank. "This panatella built hombre never lied none a-tall. Let's be a-gettin' on home an' into some hay. Maybe some of us will be hearin' the birdies sing by this time tomorrow night, or the calves a-bawlin' on the bed ground where Saint Peter is the trail boss, an' ev'ry puncher rides bareback on a bronc that has wings an' feathers in his tail."

Toward early morning Slim Weeks was placed on board a train which was flagged on the flats. One of the boys went with him to San Antonio.

PEACE! The very word arose to Frank's lips as he splashed water over his naked breast and shoulders at the horse trough the following morning. The thought of peace was everywhere; the idea of serenity dwelt in the sky and earth and air.

Yet as the men filed into the cookhouse they were imbued with a strange silence. Their faces wore the grim aspects of those who have set a course toward an objective of uncertainty. Even the cook had lost his wonted sourness and spoke more often that had ever been known of him. Tom English, as though to add to the tensity of the situation, ate with his men.

"Why didn't some o' yuh boys wake me up for the buryin'?" asked Frank in a mild tone of reproof.

"What buryin'?" asked Tubby Hodgins.

"Ain't somebody dead?"

"Yuh're right, Fadeaway," yelled an old hand, "yuh shore is c'rect. If we don't stop ponderin' an' studyin' about what maybe ain't a-goin' to happen this afternoon, some of us is liable to get the hell-for-home-town blues. Perk up, yuh bronc fightin' fools! Since when did a ruckus with a bunch of Mex's get to puttin' the fear o' God in a Texan's bosom?"

The cook showed the relief first; he bawled out a hand for asking for more eggs. Somebody laughed, and as is the case with men of this caliber their racing thoughts ceased to gallop and their tongues ran relay to their flashing humor. In ten minutes the scuffling bodies, winding from the headquarters to the grain and harness sheds, told of a dozen heedless contests.

That morning was spent looking to rigging, riding stock, canteens, and arms and ammunition. Shortly before noon twenty-two men had left the ranch by divers routes to meet at an agreed spot on the Nueces River.

At two o'clock every man was in his place. Fadeaway Frank, wearing the peculiar hat of Slim Weeks and riding the man's pinto, remained on the east slope of a high ridge where he watched the country for signs of the coming of the Kelly outlaws. And he looked like Meeks from a distance.

At a little past two he rode down on a bunch of cows, tall, wiry, racing, Mexican bred longhorns, and prodded them on the run over the brow of the hill. Before they had traveled a quarter of a mile every one was hidden in a cloud of dust kicked up by their running hoofs. They appeared like hunched horsemen.

"That'll tell 'em I'm a-comin'," he mused.

And it assuredly did. Across the river, in a tangle of willows, a bunch of Kelly's men detected that onsweeping white mass of flying earth and at once forded the river and took positions in a slight depression which controlled the approach to the river's ford. Here they waited.

As Frank neared the river he headed the band of cows up the stream, when he saw a willow top tremble a signal to him, and eased down the speed of his pony to a gentle and slow lope. The cows at once fell into a walk and the dust settled. A scramble of horses was seen near the shallow water of the Nueces crossing.

Too late!

Kelly's men attempted to rush out of the bottom, and a dozen rifle shots sent them scurrying back to the shelter of the willows. Frank fell to the off side of his pony—rode like a demon for his concealed companions, and though scattered bullets were kicking dust about his rushing horse he disappeared in the dense growth along the stream.

Delivering his pony to a young puncher who had been detailed to keep the horses together behind the breast of a large sand dune, Fadeaway joined Tom English and threw himself to the earth at his side. "Colonel," he said, "in a jam of this-yere kind, most men gets tangled up an' separated entire from all system. We goes right far, on our own. An' maybe, something like that'll happen to me. An' if it does, an' I ain't nowheres about when this smokin's done, then yuh look for me at that little old two bit ranch where I left Midnight. That rancher ain't much on the cow business—maybe, if he was to see two hundred head o' his own, in one bunch, he'd think 'em buffalo—yet he's all man, an' I'm a-sayin' that Mex prisoner I left there will be there when either of us gets there. An' yuh better amble thataway, an' I will, too. Otherwise, if I'm with yuh, an' can sit a saddle, we'll head direct for that hole in the sentinel rock before Hell's Hidden Heaven. Does yuh understand?"

"Yes," replied the rancher. "If you get lost we're to ride for Aiken's place an' meet you or take that Mexican as a guide."

"That's it! Now I'm a-saunterin' up where I can see what's a-comin' off. Yuh stay back a little, Colonel, an' give some o' us younger fellas a chance to get experience."

"Experience," jibed Tom English, but Fadeaway was gone.

SOON the bark of his carbine was heard in a sharp serenade. He was locating the brush that held no human form.

From the other side of the river a hat showed. Instantly four rustlers hurled a quartette of bullets in its direction and the Stetson was withdrawn. Then the Bar Circle C began in earnest.

"Them boys is now a-sittin' right

pretty on that knoll," shouted Tubby Hodgins, "an' if Kelly's hombres tries to duck into that flowin' mud they'll shore catch billy-complected-hell an' repeat."

"I g-got one," yelled a hand known as Stutterin' Sol, "I g-g-got him b-b'-tween th-that mesquite an' that p-p-p-patch o' cat-claw. I ru-ru-ruined his k-k-nee cap so's he ca-ca-can't pray much no more."

"Sol," yelled the foreman, "if yore trigger finger was stringhalted like yore tongue yuh'd be from Decoration Day to Christmas usin' a box o' shells. Try talkin' between words a while."

"Never m-m-m-mind," sang out Sol. "I just sh-sh-sh-shot a cigarette outa José Medrano's face with my last one."

Fadeaway Frank crawled over to Sol and said, "If yuh got that kid located, don't salivate him. It was his mother who helped me make my getaway an' she's takin' care of Miss Mary Lee."

"All right."

"Tell him to keep outa sight. Yuh talk Mex, don't yuh?"

"T-t-t-tell him yu-yoresef!" stammered Sol. "When I tu-tu-tu-tries that it's—w-w-w-why, when I gu-gu-gets excited in spu-spu-spu-Spanish, it's nuthin' ssh-ssh-ssh-short of shoutin' hell. Ain't English bad enough f-f-f-for Pete's sake?"

Then across the intervening tangle of undergrowth and windrows of sand, Fedeaway spoke to José Medrano in his own tongue and told him to keep out of sight and no harm would befall him. The effect of that message, in the cold calm tones of Frank, hurled consternation into the willows where the outlaws were concealed.

An audible murmur of discontent rang among the hillocks where the Mexican contingent lay. That act had the effect of creating instantly, a breach in the ranks of Kelly's men. Some of them wanted to know where José was secreted; many of them openly accused the youth of betraying his comrades; others maintained a constantly rising outcry against him, until at last Munson's voice was heard commanding them to keep quiet.

An hour went by.

Sixty minutes of tense and weakening vigilance. A few exchanges between the band had taken place; two of the English ranch hands had been slightly wounded. But at that moment——

Fadeaway saw a speck of dust fleck from the top of the dune behind which some of the Bar Circle C hands were guarding the ford. This meant that Kelly had outwitted them—he had left some of his men on the opposite bank, behind the English hands who were posted there to prevent his men from crossing the stream. These men were now under fire. If they were killed——

He dropped back quietly, without saying a word to his companions, secured his horse and disappeared down the river for a mile. Here he circled, and placing a straggling fringe of greasewood between himself and the scene of the fight rode along it in a westerly direction. When two miles had been covered he turned north and picked a careful course back toward the river. When he was within a half mile from the ford he saw six horses tied behind some heavy clumps, and slightly to the right and ahead of these, six bodies stretched on the brow of a dune.

He dismounted, tied his pony, and working his way forward a little at a time, succeeded in reaching a place where he could get a good shot at the hidden riflemen. At his first fire he wounded one of the men in the leg. The others arose and started to run; but before they crossed an open spot he had brought two of them to the ground. Then the rest vanished, and he retraced his steps to his horse. He had seen enough, and at that revelation decided to head for the river and the retreat of the outlaws. One of the men who had disappeared in the mesquite he had definitely identified as Big Kelly.

Just as he reached his horse and stepped into a stirrup he saw Kelly and Andrews and a Mexican leap into their saddles and swing at a furious gallop directly for the Rio Grande. There could be no doubt in Fadeaway's mind of what that meant. The thought that went winging and crashing through his mind was, could he beat them to it?

He stuck a rowel in the pinto's flank and the little pony tore away at a speed that tickled Fadeaway.

Aiken's ranch was a good four hours' ride away. To race there, secure Midnight and tell the rancher what he intended to do would give the bandits a great advantage, Frank knew. But he

decided that come what may that would be his objective, and accordingly, he set a hidden course parallel to that of the outlaws and put the pinto over the ground fast. In another hour Kelly and his men were slightly in the rear of him.

Then came the wind.

It blew directly against his back and when the first twisting gusts caught him, Fadeaway smiled as he pulled up his neck scarf and jammed his Stetson down over his forehead. Once he looked back. The air was a mass of flying particles of alkali and sand through which nearby trees appeared all the world like ghastly human forms, aged and withered.

Now he threw caution and all thought of his trail away. Knee guiding his pony he struck directly ahead, cutting off all sharp angles and making for the shortest line between Aiken's ranch and the spot where he rode.

Soon the sun was nothing but a dull wallow of light in a smoky and whirling sky—birds went by him on a tossing flight; jackrabbits scurried for shelter and cows were seen tails to the storm, heads down and bodies jammed into the protection of mesquite, prickly pear clumps and greasewood trees.

PEACE! Above the howl and the grinding tear of that flying, dust laden wind, this thought crashed like a pleasurable pain into his consciousness and Fadeaway literally tossed his chin in the air and laughed under the dirty kerchief now hung about his mouth.

He tried to solve that strange sensation that had come so suddenly into his mind; he endeavored to fathom the eager thrill which raced throughout his being. He made the attempt to penetrate that subtle something which banished all thought of fear from his mind, but he could not.

What made him tear on and on in the very teeth of a west Texas dust storm, when all men know that under such circumstances the only thing to do is to seek shelter and let the wind howl itself out? What made him dare the danger of being caught out there where no shelter could be found?

Then before he knew what he was doing he found himself singing, singing a strange ballad of the cowcamp and corral; a song nighthawks sing to keep the cattle contented and prevent them from strampeding at some sudden noise of the range. The words were thrown back in his throat, but he repeated them mentally,

When I'm ridin', just a-ridin',
Where the mesquite's gray an' ga'nt;
An' my pony's feet's a-glidin',
To a tune I likes to chant.
Don't yuh know that I'm plumb airy?
Just a sunbaked fool canary,
What rides a-singin' to his Mary,
While the sweet long shadows slant?

Then he knew.

"Doggone!" he chuckled into the wind. "Doggone, Fadeaway! Yuh shore is a sunbaked fool canary! Yuh, why, yuh—maybe the Colonel is plumb right. Maybe she loves to see a man be a man, but ain't got no hankerin' after seein' a big boy like me tryin' to act like a lover. A lover—God, ain't I the fool?"

Then he seemed to see her as he last saw her with an arm around the old form of the Mexican crone; and he heard the brown pony clicking the pebbles of the little gulch brook as he went off, the memory of her smile in his eyes. Now, above the wail of the wind, out of the suffocation of the flying dust, he heard a whisper, an agony of murmuring words, and they seemed to carry a sudden conviction of truth within the body of their phrasing—"I know you'll come back."

IN THIS half delirious state of mind the miles and minutes passed. At last he came to a section of country broken and water cut, and he searched around for some sign of Aiken's ranch. At last he found a bit of fence and down this he rode to a corral where a windmill reared grim and vague through the whirling spray of sailing dust. In a few moments he had found the house, told Aiken of the fight now going on, and of the approach of the outlaws. Then the two men changed the hiding place of the prisoner Frank had left at the cabin on his trip in. He feared Kelly.

After a delay of not more than twenty-five minutes Midnight flashed out of the yard and set a long, even, distance eating, fox trot course for the

Rio Grande. The water refreshed both man and beast when that stream was forded, and the journey was continued without a halt. At early morning Frank saw the horses he had released from the bandit's corral; they were several miles south of the mesa where they had been fenced. The sight cheered him.

At noon he discerned the outline of the large mesa on the far side of which lay the entrance to Hell's Hidden Heaven. Setting an oblique course he made for the dense thicket of piñon on the spur which he must ride to bring him to the cliff back of the rustler's cabins. That night he rode down the trail ready to make the jump across the wide break in the ridge.

There was no moon, and after a brief examination he decided that in the exhausted condition of his horse it would be a folly to expect her to make the leap successfully.

Then another plan suggested itself.

He rode to the top of the crest, walked Midnight into the trees and down to the edge of the timber to the very brink of the cliff where the wall fell away for a sheer plunge of three hundred feet or more.

Then, dropping prone, he stared over the rock and saw a ledge, or what appeared to be a ledge. It stuck out from the face thirty-five feet below the rim of the cliff. Here was a chance! If he could keep the mare standing where she was; and from the saddle horn let both his ropes drop over the side, he could let himself down to the ledge, then farther down to the trail and thus come into the canyon. Then on his way back with her, he could——

He raised his eyes to a black shadow which he knew to be the cabin where he had left Mary Lee. As he stared at the squat shape he saw a sheen of light flash like a band of gold out of its single window. His heart pounded; his hands clutched at the raw edges of the wall.

Then he heard a scream.

It rang through the hollows of the gulch like some hateful and odious thing; it struck into the sleepy, tired fibers of his brain and tingled them to a keen alertness. He waited for no more.

Jumping to his feet he shook out both ropes, tied them together, fixed one end securely to the horn of the saddle, dropped the other over the cliff, swung it clear till it fell full length. Then, swinging his carbine through his neck scarf and hanging it down his back, he jammed a part of a log between two openings in the rim and over this laid the rope so that it would not cut against the rocks. Abruptly he dropped from sight and slid down the lariat.

Double hitching the end of the lass rope around a jutting edge of the ledge upon which the rope had dropped him, and assuring himself that Midnight would not be able to tear it loose without pulling off the saddle, he grabbed his carbine and hurried down the trail, slid down a smooth decline and lit running almost before the cabin from which the light came.

Covering the distance quietly and quickly, he stood for an instant peering through the window. The sight that met his vision caused him to hurl all caution aside. Mary Lee was struggling in the grasp of two burly men—one an American, the other a Mexican!

FADEAWAY hurried to the door, turned its latch and kicked it open. At the same time he pulled a quick bead with a six-gun on the American and sent a .45 ball through the fellow's shoulder. The man dropped, and his companion wheeled to stare into Frank's face, now a mask of terrible fury. The Mexican fell back from the girl, hands above his head, his lips attempting to frame some English word.

Mary Lee composed herself and ran to Fadeaway's side. "Hurry," she said; "we haven't a moment to lose. These men have just let slip the news that Kelly is coming up the gulch and that there has been a big fight. Let's get out of here."

Frank gently put out a hand and placed Mary Lee to one side. Then he walked to the unwounded Mexican and removed his gun and knife, and with a piece of tie rope, which he carried tucked in his belt, he bound the man's hands to his feet. With the loose ends he tied his victim to a ringbolt which he found embedded in a foot log of the wall. All this time the injured man on the floor lay as one dead, but as Frank turned he twisted and tried to raise a gun. The effort was too great, how-

ever, and he fell back racked with agony, the gun dropping from his twitching fingers. Frank kicked the gun to a corner of the room and for the first time actually noted the condition of Mary Lee. She was dressed only in a night garment, a quaint cotton affair which had evidently been a loan from the old woman.

"Ma'am," he said, "yuh pile into them clothes o' yores just as soon as yuh can."

He turned his back and dropped to the floor beside the injured American. "Yuh got it kinda hard, old-timer," he said compassionately, "an' from the way yuh're leakin' I'd say it's close-the-cases for yuh, right soon. If yuh gotta message yuh want to go any place give it to me, now."

"Get outa here, Fadeaway," moaned the man. "Yuh don't know me but I do yuh. My home's in Craig, Colorado, an' if yuh ever get up thataway don't tell 'em how I played out my hand. But before I go I wanna tell yuh to hightail outa yere, quick. Kelly come in a while ago, with Munson an' a Mex, an' told us of the fight that's goin' on back on the Nueces. He sent us up yere to get this gal an' take her down the river. Andrews an' the rest o' the men he sent over west to bring in the other Mex members o' this outfit. If we ain't back directly, he'll be comin' up an' then it'll be just too bad for yuh an' her. We never missed yuh till Kelly told us of seein' yuh."

"Thank yuh, old scout," replied Frank. "Now let's take a peep at that hole in yore frame—maybe I c'u'd plug it a bit."

He bent over the wounded man, tore open his shirt, and saw a jagged hole below the right shoulder from which the blood oozed in a pulsating flow. Mary Lee, now partly dressed, saw the ugly wound and tearing a silken undergarment in two tossed it to Fadeaway, who ripped it into packs and stuffed the hole. Then he pulled a pillow from the end of the bed and placed it beneath the man's head. He laid him nearer the fresh air of the door.

"They's a Mex woman, outside," said the American scarcely above a whisper, "an' when we was a-comin' in she tried to stop us an' that Greaser stuck a knife in her. She's at the end o' this adobe."

Mary Lee, now dressed, came to Frank and kneeled at his side. "You bring her in here, Frank," she said, "and I'll watch this man and do all I can for him."

Fadeaway opened the door, ran to the corner of the cabin, picked up the huddled form he saw there and carried it back to the room. Here he placed the old woman on the bed and Mary Lee opened her dress. A deep knife thrust was revealed just below the heart. Frank shook his head as the girl turned a blanched face up to his. At that instant the old woman opened her eyes and smiled in a wan, miserable way as she took in the face of Mary Lee, and then let her eyes stray to the features of Frank. "Before I go—" she said weakly, "paper and something with which to write. For the love of God, give me paper!"

Frank took a small memorandum book, carried in a hip pocket of his overalls, and pulled from a pocket of this a stub of a pencil. These he gave into the hands of the old woman as she lifted herself partly from the blankets.

She began to write, in a labored and pitiful agony, and the boy and the girl turned their faces away from the horror of the scene. Only the scratching of the pencil could be heard—this and a slight wheezing sound which came from her dying throat. After a while they heard her voice and turned back to see her fallen on the bed, the book and pencil near a wrinkled hand.

"Señor," she whispered, "what I have written is for the eye of Señor Jerry Whitcomb alone. To a man like you I need say nothing more. You will cherish the wish of a dying woman?"

"I won't look at it, *amigo*," replied Frank, returning the book to his pocket. "What more can I do for you? Ain't they something?"

"My boy, José, señor! If you can, help him. Deep in his young heart there is no blackness; I tell you a mother knows the heart of her child. Help him if you can! And you, señorita——"

She smiled in a beautiful way and reached out a hand toward Mary Lee.

"Yes," said the girl, "what is it you want?"

"Kiss me, my child—let me feel your lips on my old brow."

Mary Lee touched her lips to the cheek and forehead of the old woman.

There was a deep, long tremor, which

racked the wasted form, a heavy sigh, and the tired old eyes closed. Frank took the girl from the bed and pulled a blanket across the woman's form.

THEN, into the terrifying stillness of that small, low room, there stole the faintly increasing sounds of galloping horses.

"Come on, ma'am," yelled Fadeaway; then to the wounded American, "If yuh lives I won't be forgettin' what yuh've just told me, podner," he said, "that is, if I gets outa this yere jam."

"Kick over my gun," replied the man. "Kick it over as yuh go out the door, an' if I gets a chance, I'll shore reduce the odds ag'in yuh an' that gal. Why yuh don't kill me, I don't know."

Mary Lee was at the door, and when Frank reached her side she stepped into the night. As Fadeaway was on the point of leaving the cabin he stooped, picked up the fallen Colt and fossed it beside the wounded man. He heard Mary Lee say, "Which way do we go?"

"Straight ahead an' up that shale slide," he replied, and grasping her hand ran for the rock wall. They scrambled up the face and reached the trail. Here they ran as fast as the incline would permit—stopping at last directly below the spot where the end of the lass rope was tied.

Frank removed the hitch, threw the rope about the girl's waist and securely tied it.

Just at that instant the entire sky was illumined with a burst of light, which ran in great sheaths of color to the zenith of the heavens. Dawn! With it the world awakened and a slight wind echoed in the gulch. Then in a moment the full power of the morning light swept away the last vestige of the night gloom.

The boy and girl stood on that narrow ledge looking into each other's eyes. No word was uttered—no speech was needed between them.

Down the canyon, there sounded the rush of running hoofs.

The rope seemed to move, to stir, to draw upon the slender and fragile waist of the girl. A look of strange emotion swept in the eyes of Mary Lee and she stared into Frank's face with the wonder gaze of a child.

"Ma'am," he said, "this lass rope's tied to my saddle an' Midnight's way up yonder. She's r'arin' to pull yuh outa yere. If yuh can make her understand tell her to go!"

"And leave you alone on this ledge, with those men coming up that gulch. I should say not. Untie me, please."

Frank's voice shouted in a mighty tone. "Hee, yi, Midnight! Hee, yi, old girl! Get on outa yere now!"

Mary Lee was jerked off her feet and dangled upward along the face of the cliff. Over her features there spread a look of mingled alarm and wonder. As she arose, slowly, gradually, along that weatherbitten front, her hands above her head, her eyes looking at the ledge, the voice of Fadeaway came to her. "Good-by an' God bless yuh, Mary Lee!"

Midnight suddenly ceased to pull on the rope and the girl hung swaying along the wall. Fadeaway was close enough to her so that by stepping into a crevice he, too, could have been pulled to safety. But he knew this would have left them both but swinging targets for the riders coming up the gulch.

"Quick," cried Mary Lee, "there is yet time for you to come with me."

For answer she heard him yell, "Hi! Midnight!"

A bullet spattered on the rock above Frank's head. "Good-by, Mary Lee!" he shouted as he dropped flat on the trail.

"I'll come back when I reach the top," she cried in agony.

"No, ride around to the Big Mesa. Yore dad's a-comin' thataway!"

Then he settled himself and began to pump lead at the three horsemen he saw coming on a rush toward the cabins.

He shot two of the horses and was pulling down on the third when a sound of falling rock above made him turn his head and look up. There on the verge of the rock, where earth and sky seemed to meet, he saw Mary Lee disappearing. Then her head appeared and he heard her voice. "How do I ride from here to get down from this ridge?"

He cried out the instructions, and as he watched her fallen hair swaying in the breeze of the high air, it seemed that the sunlight upon it had turned it suddenly to flowing gold. Then she disappeared and he fancied that a finger had touched her lips as she jumped clear of the rim.

WHEN he turned his eyes once more to the canyon floor not a human form was to be seen. With inexorable decision he resolved upon a desperate chance. He dropped from the spot where he had been lying, hit the trail on the run and darted swiftly along it at a frantic speed. Twice he fell, twice a bullet smashed the face of granite behind him, and then he came to the last turn of the trail and jumped clear of the wall and ran behind a large boulder.

How long he remained in that cramped position he never knew, but the sun traveled the heavens until, as he wiped his forehead, he saw it immediately overhead and knew that the hour was nearly noon. Twice he had stolen a furtive glance from his covert to see a man's form running. Once from an adobe corner to a pile of stones near the stream, another time from a tree to a corner of a rock somewhere behind him.

On both occasions he fired and missed each figure.

The creek was immediately below him and the sound of its cool and gurgling water accentuated the pangs of his thirst, for he had partaken of no drink since early the night before. Now the extreme heat of the day baked the moisture from his body and he fought an ardent craving to rush to the delicious water at his feet.

He caught the faintest rustle of sound above and back of him, and whirling his head he saw a white burst of smoke just as he flung up his carbine and fired at a hat he detected back of a rifle muzzle. Simultaneously with the discharge of his own carbine he saw another spitting smoke and felt a stinging pain race through his right shoulder.

Just before he slumped to the earth at the base of the rock, he saw a figure tumble out of a cleft in the granite where the smoke had appeared. Then everything went black before his eyes. When he came to he felt numb; he experienced a slight dead feeling in the region of his upper chest and a soreness along the tendons of his neck. An arm hung wet and listless at his side.

With the uninjured hand he whipped a six-gun from a holster and twisting about sidled himself to his feet along the boulder. Then the thirst hit him again, and this time the attack was so severe that he decided that he must have one long drink of water at any cost.

Reconnoitering the creek he saw a large smooth stone protruding above the bank. He determined to take one swift look from the rock, and if the coast were clear, to attempt to make that stone. His glance revealed nothing.

Jerking himself upright he staggered from his hiding place, slipped quickly into the creek, and was ascending it slowly toward the stone when he saw two forms run from between the cabins and level their guns at him. One of these he recognized as Big Kelly, the other as Munson. He took a quick hip shot at Munson and pulled the trigger. His aim was true and Munson fell immediately at Kelly's feet.

Then Kelly fired, and Fadeaway once more experienced that stab of fiery pain. This time the agony was complete; he had been struck through the left hip. But before he could bring his gun around, for he wanted to drop Kelly, even as he felt himself sinking to the shallow water of the creek, he saw an arm dart out of the cabin door at the side of Kelly, and from it a burst of flame.

The outlaw staggered, half spun on a heel, dropped his gun and fell face downward in the dirt.

At that instant Fadeaway saw no more. His head dropped on the bank, and the cool water ran swishing about his unconscious form.

THE next he knew he was in a clean white bed; a nurse was sitting near a window and Tom English beside the pillow fanning him with a copy of the El Paso *Herald*.

"Howdy, Colonel," he said with a smile. "This-yere shore looks mighty nice, don't it?"

The nurse roused, Tom English bent over the bed. "Thank God!" was all he said.

And to hide his emotion he walked to the window and looked into the street. Then he heard Fadeaway say, in a strained and weakened voice, "What time is it, ma'am?"

"Three o'clock. You mustn't talk, you know," she replied.

"What day is it?"

"Tuesday."

"What's the month?"

"September."

"September!" Frank's laugh was

full of joy, if not very robust. "Dog-gone! Old Rip Van Wrinkle ain't got nuthin' on me for sleepin'. Come on, Colonel, an' spill it. I'm as silent as a stone an' as speechless as a big mouthed bass, but if ever a man was ear hungry then I'm shore him. What I craves is gossip."

The nurse raised a finger to her lips and Fadeaway caught the gesture. "Just let him tell the high spots, ma'am," he said, "an' right away I'll lay me down to sleep."

And then Tom English narrated the finish of the fight on the Nueces and how his men surrounded the Kelly gang just as the dust storm struck and how all were captured or wounded with the exception of Munson who had escaped on a fast horse. And how fifteen Bar Circle C hands pursued him to the river and beyond; and because of the storm could not find the home of Aiken in time to secure the prisoner and force him to guide them into the secret covert of the gang. How as they were riding into the thick growth on the west side of the Rio Grande that last morning, they saw Midnight coming—and Mary Lee joined and guided them back into Hell's Hidden Heaven.

"And then, my boy," said English, "we saw where you had been at work, for above your body, at the approach to the cliff trail, the first object that met our sight was the hanging form of a Mexican. Then between the cabins we found Munson and Kelly, both of them seriously wounded—they're in this hospital now. We brought all of you to Laredo just as soon as we could get wagons. You surely did some great shooting."

"I didn't get Big Kelly. I saw an arm reach out of one of the cabins an' wham him."

"That explains something. There's a man we found wounded in the cabin, that Mary Lee said you shot, and in his delirium he has spoken several times of getting even with you. He's a boy from Craig, Colorado, by the name of Tulton. Some kind of contest hand, I believe—worked around rodeos a good deal."

"He told the truth. I saw him shoot Kelly just as he was pulling down on me. We got to take care of him an' that Mex kid José."

"That's all, today," decided the nurse, and Tom English left the room.

AS SOON as he was able to travel, Fadeaway was allowed to fulfill his desire to go to Jerry Whitcomb to recover from his wounds, and many of the Bar Circle C boys were in town to see him off.

It was expected that he would make a night train for San Antonio, take a bit of rest in that city, and then proceed by slow stages to the Triple Links in Wyoming. Mary Lee was coming over late that afternoon to see him off and it had been the first time in three weeks that her father had believed her capable of traveling. She, too, had been exhausted and confined to her bed since the day she had left Frank.

Twenty minutes before the early afternoon train was to leave, Fadeaway, sitting on the veranda of the hospital, suddenly called Tubby Hodgins to him. "Tub, yuh old armadillo," he said, "call me that hack. I'm a-goin' on the hell-for-rough local."

"Yuh're what?"

"I'm a-goin' on that one-fifteen disease for San Antone."

"Why, man—Miss Mary Lee is a-comin' over an' the ladies of Laredo, an' they say of Nuevo Laredo, is a-goin' to give yuh a Fourth of July, Arbor Day, Christmas an' Easter—all rolled into one. An' thay's to be ice cream, ribbons, white roses an' kisses at the train. Man' yuh can't miss that!"

"That's *why* I'm a-goin'!"

"Why, man, I c'u'dn't allow that. It'd break Miss Mary Lee's heart."

"That's *why*, old-timer! If I meet that gal, then I suffer with heartbreak all the rest o' my life. Look in my eyes. Can't yuh see the diff'rent kinds of a fool I bin a-makin' outa myse'f?"

"Yuh means that yuh is a-thinkin' *thataway* about her?"

Fadeaway nodded an affirmative.

"Yuh pore son-of-a-gun. Of co'se I'll he'p yuh. Hey, hack! C'mon over thisaway." Tubby's voice trembled with compassion.

And when the vehicle drove up, Tubby and the Mexican driver loaded Frank in the wagon and jogged him to the depot.

A few days after the return, as Jerry Whitcomb and Fadeaway were sitting in the middle room, Frank suddenly sat forward in his chair. "Mister Jerry," he said, "get my old overalls—thay's something I oughta give to yuh as soon's

I lit. Ain't I the forgettin'est white man?"

Jerry brought the bloodstained, dirt covered overalls into the room and Frank pulled out the memorandum book in which the old Mexican woman had written. Opening it to a turned down page he handed it to Whitcomb. A deep pallor faded and glowed on the rancher's face. "What did she say?" he asked. "I mean, just before she passed away."

"Nothin' except that I give it to yuh, without lookin' at it. But when I was with her that time, that first time, outside them cabins, she told me that yuh saved her from something an' at that time she loved yuh an' didn't know it—an' that she always had loved yuh."

"It was a good many years ago that I met her," began Whitcomb; "it was over in Sonora, near Hermosillo. Her mother, a Yaqui, had run away with a Spaniard, and the Indians in that tribe, who never permit a girl to marry any man but a Yaqui, made her an outcast. It seems that this woman knew where the Indians mined virgin gold and she is supposed to have told her husband—at any rate, that is the story they told. As the years went by, this Spaniard became wealthy. The girl grew to be fifteen or sixteen and one day her mother and father were both killed in her presence. She was kidnapped, and was to have been traded to a Mexican at Guzman. I had seen her and had many times admired the work she did with silver and gold. When I learned that the Mexican had come for her I put the fear of God in him—run him out of the country and gave the girl money to go to Mexico City. That night she married a halfbreed *vaquero* and the next morning before she and her man set out across the hills she rode out to my ranch and gave me that silver scarf holder. This letter she writes tells me something that might be of interest to you. I'll read it."

With a hard twist of the thumb and finger on the inner side of the trinket I gave you, you will take it apart. In it you will find what I wanted to tell you many years ago. But I was afraid, then. Now I want you to know. If you will take this to the place I have written or send it, a very old man, my grandfather, a Yaqui, will tell you how true my words are. Give my boy enough to make him comfortable, please.

Tuuscha moo ah

And below this, continued in Spanish was written:

Which means "Her Without A Name!" I love thee, mia Jerry Whitcomb, and have for thirty years. I die, now, old—and I am but forty-five.

A thick silence fell upon the two men, and Fadeaway pulled the scarf holder from a pocket of the overalls and extended it to Whitcomb.

With a rapid and hard twist of the fingers the rancher wrenched the trinket till it came apart in his hands. And there in a small inner compartment a piece of rice paper showed. This was removed, unfolded, and taken to a window. It bore this legend:

Six miles from Mule Pass, down Chiquita Creek, is the Cathedral Rock. Up beyond that as far as a strong man can throw a stone is a rip in the rock and twenty steps inside this hole is the opening to the Yaqui mine. One man, my grandfather, knows this secret. My mother told it to me and I give it to you because you saved me. Not now, but when my grandfather, White Owl, is dead, go back and take what you want.

"Man!" yelled Fadeaway. "I sees right this minute where I an' yuh is turned prospector. An' when the mariposa lilies blooms up yere next spring we'll be just somewheres else, eh?"

Out in the yard there sounded the grating noise of iron tires running over loose gravel. Jerry Whitcomb's face bore a strange and quizzical expression. He ran from the room, on through a long hall, and Frank heard him slam the big front door with a dull boom.

It seemed but a moment later, as he sat staring at two holes in the center of black blotches on the blue overalls, made by the bullets which had entered his body, he caught the stealthy sound of a door opening back of him.

He turned, and nearly leaped from

his chair—in two directions at once. One to escape, and one to rush to her, Mary Lee!

The girl came forward before he could rise on his dragging leg. She pressed a hand on his shoulder in insistence that he remain still. Without a word they stared at each other.

Then Fadeaway spoke. "Mary Lee! I'm sorry—maybe yuh know why I ran away?"

The girl smiled and shook her head in womanly resignation. "Fadeaway Frank running away—after all that happened!"

"Ma'am," assured Frank, "had I to clean up all Sonora with a popgun——"

"Silly!" the girl remarked. "Dear, silly, blind man!" She dropped, kneeling beside the chair. "Don't you really understand?"

Fadeaway stared at her for a moment, unable—daring not—to comprehend. Then as the whole immensity of it overwhelmed him he suddenly seized her, intoxicated, unable to think, and held her blindly.

Later, much later, he found his tongue. "Honey, talk an' tell me," he said, "that this ain't that old fever in my haid."

"Sssh! my man," she said, smiling happily, "tell me, now, what you wanted to say to me as Midnight was pulling me up that cliff."

But at that instant Jerry Whitcomb and Tom English entered the room and as Fadeaway caught their eyes he broke into a whoop of happiness. "Doggone, Colonel," he cried, "what yuh told me that mornin' in the bunkhouse shore ain't no good ag'in the downright orn'ryness of a Kaintuckian, is it?"

"I don't know whether that is it, or whether there is any escape for the man whom a Danville lady makes up her mind to tame," replied the Texan. "My boy, it may make you feel better to know that along with your other happinesses, Mexico has offered to prosecute her own citizens, and that indictments are out and a conviction assured of Big Kelly, Munson and Andrews. José Medrano and Tulton and five other witnesses make our case a cinch. And I have Tulton and Medrano over on the Bar Circle C. And they, with all the other boys, want to see you as soon as they can."

"Yes," sang out Jerry Whitcomb, "and when you take him back, Mary Lee, make him promise to let you go with him when he starts out to locate that gold deposit. I give this to you both."

And he flipped the legend *Tuuscha moo ah* had secreted in the neck scarf holder.

"Why, Mister Jerry," protested Frank. "Does yuh mean to *give* us that?"

"It's the best wedding present I know," laughed Jerry.

"Lord," cried Fadeaway, crushing Mary Lee to his shoulder, "I'm as lucky as a hawg in forty acres o' Sudan grass."

"An' yore face is as red as if yuh'd been wallowin' in poison ivy," remarked Tubby Hodgins as he set down a double armful of suitcases.

"Ssssh!" said Fadeaway as he saw the old top hand's laughing face, "go on out an' smell some real sage. An' let this be yore battle cry—when yuh're in Wyomin', yuh have stopped yore roamin'."

"Now, go on away, all of you," ordered Mary Lee. "I don't want you to get Frank excited."

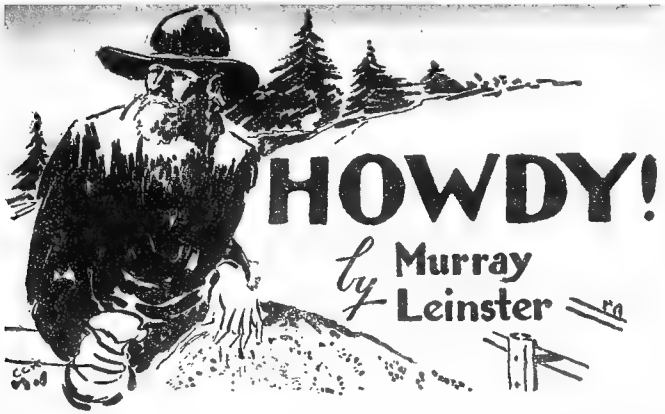
And as the men filed out the door and Tubby closed it after them, he turned to Tom English and said, "Colonel Tom, I wants yuh to tell me what kinda medicine a woman mixes up that can make a man look as damned silly as Fadeaway did when I closed that door! Excited? Huh that-there waddy is loco for life!"

A corker for next time—a complete novel

CROOK'S TOUR

by

FREDERICK J. JACKSON



Author of "Fog," etc.

They had hated for years, these old-timers, and the habit clung. Twice each day they met in the deserted gold camp, spoke, and parted. But the winters grew long and the rock more barren; their hate, one day, took an unrecognizable form.

ONCE upon a time—as all good stories should begin—Eyrie was a town. A real town, with a full complement of dance-halls, saloons, gambling houses and a jail. Champagne came in cases over the mountain trails, to be drunk out of tin cups or, more informally, from the bottle itself. Ostrich feathers and pink spangled gowns, once a piano, even carefully crated paintings for the Eyrie House, came upon the backs of burros or in huge, lumbering wagons.

It was named by a young Easterner and it sprang up as by magic. The first girl baby in the camp could have gone to college in the East on the dust and nuggets showered upon her as gifts. The first court in the county, and the county was as large as many New England states, was held in Eyrie. For a space, while the placer workings held good, it was a whirlwind. Then came a period of decay, with the more prosperous elements drifting to newer and consequently more alluring spots.

For perhaps five years, perhaps ten, it slumbered. Only a few of the more patient worked their cradles beside its swift stream. Here and there a Chinaman frugally earned riches by panning the sands the superior white man considered beneath his notice. Eyrie was a half deserted mining camp.

But then came the hardrock men. They came, they saw—and Eyrie was reborn. Its earlier grandeur was forgotten in the magnificence of its new youth. A thousand shafts dotted the hills about it. Plumes of steam drifted from a thousand hoist engines. Again a whirlwind of activity. Again came the champagne and the pictures and the brightly painted ladies and the immaculate, imperturbable gentlemen who wielded pasteboards instead of picks, and juggled chips instead of blasting powder for their fortunes.

And again it died. Even the Chinamen deserted it this time, having discovered the charm of payment in gold for definite work in another's diggings. It died completely, now. The doors of the log cabins sagged upon their leathern hinges. Grass grew again in its streets. Saplings sprang up close beside the porch of the Eyrie House, thrusting aside the rotted planking for space in which to grow. A deathly silence fell again upon the town and all the hills about it. Its day was done, its glory departed. Even its history was forgotten, utterly. There was nothing but decaying, blank windowed cabins and a sag-

ging board building that had once been the prideful Eyrie House to tell of the ancient times. All else was vanished.

And somewhere, far back in the haze of unremembered days, lay the beginning of the enmity between Jake Trotter and Bill Weaver. No one remains to tell the story of its beginning. Soon it will be useless to recall it, and therefore it is wise to record it before oblivion smears across the page. For it was a peculiar enmity.

Alone of all the population, they remained behind. Jake Trotter was perhaps fifty when he was left alone with his enemy. He watched the last belated hardrock man pull out, glumly loading his worldly goods upon a single burro.

"Leavin' the town to me?" he queried, with a feeble attempt at levity.

The one who was departing, cursed.

Jake chuckled. "No use swearin'," he said. "The main lode ain't been hit yet."

The other turned quickly. "You got any signs?"

Jake chuckled again. "Think I'd ha' said anything if I had?" he queried in his turn.

The hardrock man grunted, cinched his last knot, and trudged away. He was a lonely figure, making off down the valley that seemed a chasm between its confining hills, and yet gave upon a two thousand foot drop at its further end. Jake watched him out of sight and then grinned, somewhat unconvincingly. It was not altogether pleasant to be completely alone.

He was congratulating himself, though, as he turned away. He had said just the right thing to disarm the suspicions of the last man. He went slowly up the deserted street. It was unspeakably desolate. Every house empty. Doors yawning open. Posters still flaunting bright colors, calling everyone to the High Jinks Dance Hall. And the dance hall was empty. Already dust was gathering thickly upon its floors and the once so brightly polished bar. Jake was alone.

He came to a sudden halt and his eyes narrowed. A man was looking at him, very nearly the counterpart of himself. Bushy, straggling beard, already beginning to show a speckling of gray. Mud stained clothes. Rough work shirt. Heavy boots. Holster at his side. Bill Weaver, the only man in all the world Jake and despised whole heartedly.

"Howdy, Jake," drawled Bill. "Looks like we got to run the town."

Jake spat deliberately, and looked at his sole fellow townsman with hostile eyes. "I reckon," he said slowly, "you're figurin' on spyin' on me."

Bill shook his head . "I was thinkin' the same about you," he meditated. "Just thought I'd tell you I shoot awful quick if I find anybody trailin' me."

Jake's whole body trembled a little with his hatred. "An' I reck'n I'd better tell you," he said evenly, "that I'm puttin' trap guns around my workin's."

Bill grunted. "You leave me alone, an' I'll leave you alone. But I'd feel a lot better if I saw you mornin's, so's I'd know you wasn't layin' out to watch where I go."

Jake nodded. "I was goin' to say that myself," he said grimly. "An' you keep to your end o' town!" He stalked away, seething.

Then a little comedy began, which, rather oddly, did not seem to stale with age. At sunrise, Jake arose. He cooked his breakfast silently, and ate it morosely. He washed his dishes with meticulous care. Then he took down an antiquated but perfectly oiled rifle from the wall.

He walked out of his cabin. Going to meet the man he hated. Making sure Bill was not lying in wait to mark, each day, a little more of the path to his workings. Glowering, he made his daily progress.

Bill was waiting. He always was. Grinning a little, perhaps. But the grin vanished when Jake drew near. Jake would stand no nonsense.

Sourly, the two regarded each other. Booted, armed, whiskered, bristling.

Bill spoke first. "Howdy."

It held an intonation of purest sarcasm. Jake replied in kind. "Howdy."

He glared at Bill. The glare was returned. Jake turned upon his heel and walked away. He made his way deviously to his workings. Twice he paused to search the hills behind him, exhaustively, for any sign that Bill was spying upon his route. At last he dived below ground.

At night they met again. This time they did not speak. Simply stared, hostilely, and went into their respective cabins.

Summer passed. Fall arrived. The

snow line above them crept down and down. In two weeks it would reach the valley. Jake considered it gloomily.

The next morning he jerked his thumb at the encroaching blanket of white. "Supplies," he said grudgingly. "Go down tomorrow."

Bill grunted. "Yep. Was goin' to say that myself."

They went down, two silent figures, bristling, avoiding all speech. All the long day they trudged without talk. At night they camped, wordlessly. Each cooked his own supper and ate alone. In the morning they rolled out of their blankets at the same time. Bill blinked. Then, "Howdy."

The word held an intonation of purest sarcasm. Jake replied in kind. "Howdy."

He glared at Bill. The glare was returned. They loaded their burros again and went on.

They made their purchases separately. They spent three days in the tiny village. Each morning, shortly after sunrise, they found each other. Each morning they regarded each other with unwavering distaste. Each day they avoided each other thereafter.

They went back up in the hills.

Winter came, and banked the valley with snowdrifts. Work was impossible. Jake regarded a blanketed universe with completest gloom. Bill unlimbered a mouth organ and played, alone in his cabin. The thin music, drifting through the icy, still air, was weird in the wilderness. It was barely audible where Jake sat listening, more like the wraith of past gaiety in the High Jinks Dance Hall than music of the moment.

One night it stopped. It did not come again that night, or the night after.

On the third day Bill was waiting, as usual. "Howdy." The word was friendly enough, but it was spoken in a tone calculated to give offense.

Jake glared at him. "Mouth organ broken?"

Bill grunted. "Yep."

"Let's see."

Bill tossed it over. They never approached nearer than fifteen feet. Jake picked it up and gazed hostilely at Bill. The gaze was returned. They parted.

It was very late that night that thin strains of music came from Jake's cabin. Very late, indeed. The unaccustomed noise woke Bill. Next morning they met in the street as usual.

Bill's greeting held its invariable bite. Jake tossed the mouth organ back. His own word had a sting.

Bill picked up the mouth organ. They parted in mutual dislike. Arrived at his cabin, Bill tried the instrument. It worked.

Spring came again, with a rush of melted snow and mud. The stream was a turbid torrent. Summer arrived. They went down for supplies. Each day they exchanged precisely two words. They came back, unwavering in their hostility. Summer passed. Then fall. Winter came once more.

Cumbersomely, the seasons passed in their appointed course. Twin shafts, each carefully hidden, grew deeper and deeper but no more productive. Twin citizens of Eyrie, Jake and Bill grew somewhat more lined, and somewhat more bent. The speckles of gray in Bill's beard grew white, and the black grew gray. Jake's steps grew just a shade slower, and on the long climb to his hidden shaft he paused more frequently to search the hillsides behind him for a trace of Bill's spying. If, as an incident, the pauses made the climb easier, it was purely an incident. Jake was not old yet. Oh, no.

He had contrived an ingenious windlass with two ropes, by which he could hoist his bucket and swing it away from the shaft, then dump it. It made the work easier, but at best it was slow. Still, well worth doing. The mother lode was below, thick, rich quartz, with the gold in speckles, here and there even a nugget. It would run, oh, three hundred a ton, anyway. Maybe four, or even five. Riches. Life. Like Eyrie used to be.

But the occasional tiny fragments of riches he was able to accumulate grew less and less. He had had a stake. Not too much, but enough to run him for a while. Now and then he ran into a tantalizing incrop of worth while ore—not enough to be worth mining, but ore which he could crush himself in a makeshift mortar and wash, wastefully, for the infinitesimal flakes of uncombined gold. For a hard day's work he could sometimes, with luck, get two or even three dollars' worth of glittering dust.

At last even that failed him. Shamefacedly, he abandoned his workings for a space. Far off, through the hills, there

was a brooklet which even the thrifty Chinaman had not bothered with. With deep blushes, Jake built a cradle there. He washed out the sands, manfully, though ashamed to be doing placer work —he, who was a hardrock man. A steady four dollars, sometimes five. Supplies were secure. He went back, joyfully, to his shaft. The rock was barren, here, but it was a layer overlaying the mother lode, of course. Everyone knows just such things happen. One must have faith. Much faith.

They went down for supplies. Hostilely. They came back. Enemies. Fall, winter, spring, summer. Fall, winter, spring, summer. Time passed. Eyrie went back, more and more, to the forest from which it had been torn.

Only once in all the years did the two hold any other converse than their morning salutation. That was after they had been working for five years.

Jake had felt premonitory twinges. Snow was deep on the ground outside. Clouds presaged a storm. The preliminary winds were whistling dismally through the saplings among the cabins and the larger trees beyond. They moaned creepily among the empty houses. Voices of the past. That rustling, not the last, reluctant, ash dry leaves, but the movement of people. That whining noise, not the wind, but music from the High Jinks. The streets are alive with shades. They walk up and down, laughing uproariously, though the sound is whispers. Red shirts. High boots. Holsters and all too ready guns. Women, laughing shrilly. Gaiety—— Queer that a rabbit should scurry through the throng, unseeing and unseen. A rabbit on Main Street! And those trees, saplings, growing before the door of the Eyrie House. They closed the entrance, yet people do not seem to notice. They walk through them. Bubbles bursting. Mist. Lonely, sick pain in a cooling room. Then darkness, darkness, until the windows grow slowly gray.

Bill found him. He banged on the door, angrily. Jake croaked an indistinguishable word and Bill thrust open the door and came in. Snow whirled thickly in behind him.

He glared at Jake, lying upon his bunk, with frost crystals from his breath upon his blanket. "Howdy," said Bill, with elaborate irony.

He cast one comprehensive glance around, then went out again. He came back in, bringing wood. He made a fire. Looked at Jake. Muttered in his beard and flung out into the storm again. Came back with an unsavory dose he forced upon the sick man. He cooked, for one. He fed Jake. Without speech.

For three days he nursed Jake in a hostile silence. Then Jake was able to sit up. He glared at Bill's blankets in one corner. Bill had been forced to move in while Jake was disabled, but he had ostentatiously brought his own food.

"Thought you'd gone off," said Bill, offensively, "to spy on my workings. That's why I came."

A lie. A damned lie. Even a particularly damned lie. No man in or out of his senses would have tried to go prospecting in six feet of snow, more or less. Jake accepted it.

"An' I been staying here," concluded Bill, defiantly, "so you'd know I wasn't hiking off after yours. You're the sort of son of a gun who'd try shootin' if you thought it."

Jake turned his face to the wall, and slept.

Later, Bill produced a greasy pack of cards. "Play," he said offensively. "Take my mind off wanting to choke you."

They played cards in strict silence. For a week. Then Jake brought in an armful of wood. Within ten minutes Bill's blankets were gone. He, also. That night his mouth organ sounded thinly in the solitude.

Time—— Time—— The sun rolled overhead, dizzily. Now its path diverged to the south, and the wild birds made haste to overtake it. It swung to the north again and they made haste to return, joyfully. Trees put forth green, which turned again to yellow and red and gold. The saplings before the Eyrie House became young trees. Twin hidden shafts grew deeper.

Jake washed gold for his supplies and dug manfully, but a little more slowly, through the barren rock. It was a wide streak of barren, but the mother lode would be worth it. Never give up. Never. Bill ought to. Digging like a fool over yonder in the hills somewhere. Washing a stream, too. Jake had seen wet mud on his shoulders, surface mud,

one evening when there had been no rain. Fool!

They went out for supplies. Jake was getting tired now, but he still hated Bill. Old men, both of them. He stopped much more often on his way to his shaft. Eyes bothering him a little, too. Had to look very carefully to be sure Bill wasn't spying on him. Take a good, long look. If it rested him, too, no harm in that. He wasn't stopping for rest, though. Oh, no.

The packs were slim, as they came back. Jake concealed the size of his as well as he could, but it was undeniably not as full a list of staples as he could have wished. Even beans were sort of short. He'd only bought half his usual supply of bacon. Have to go hunting for meat. He shouldn't have got in that poker game. He used to play a good stiff hand, too. Foolish. Foolish.

But Bill's pack was slimmer. Bill was a fool. Hadn't been washing enough. Spending too much time in that crazy shaft of his. Nothing under it. Silly to dig. Not like Jake's shaft. The mother lode was under that. Bill would be hard put, all summer. Worse, in winter.

Summer. Glamorous green. Rippling water. Then fall again. Jake took down his rifle and went out hunting. More time lost from his mining. He got two deer. He would jerk them. Wouldn't have to buy any bacon, this time. A plan was forming in his mind, dimly. Bill was a fool. He couldn't wash out enough to buy supplies for winter. Jake could. He had just enough. His stream was panning less, now. Somehow, he didn't seem to put as much through the rocker. Had to rest so much—probably from eating fish instead of meat. Not age. Certainly not.

He heard a shot, dimly. Two days later, he heard another. Bill. What was he hunting for? Thought he was bent on sinking that crazy shaft of his——

Jake broke the tacit compact. He spied on Bill. And Bill was jerking meat for the winter. Jerking a lot of it. Too much. He probably hadn't got enough dust to pay even for a good supply of flour. Fool.

There was much meditation. Jake hated Bill, certainly. Hated him like poison. But you couldn't let a man starve right in your own town, no matter how much you hated him. And Bill would certainly starve before he would accept anything from Jake.

Jake spied again. He found Bill's placer works. A cradle, so arranged that a part of the stream flowed through it. Wooden riffles at the bottom. A spill at the lower end. The heap of sand and clay that Bill was planning to wash out.

Carefully, Jake spilled a little pile of gleaming yellow over the heap. When Bill washed that out, he'd find enough dust in the clean-up to give him beans and flour for the winter. He'd think it was a pocket he'd struck. Something like that. You couldn't let a man starve, even if you hated him. He, Jake, was all right. He'd have plenty of jerked meat.

He erased his footsteps carefully and returned to the deserted town. Bill came in a little later. They looked at each other, the picture of hostility personified. They went each into his separate cabin. Night fell.

It was a long distance to Jake's placer stream. Jake had kept out a little, of course, but most of his dust had gone to keep Bill from starving, during the winter. They would be starting down for supplies in a week or so, now, though, and if he could get a little extra to buy some more blankets—! Somehow, winters seemed to get colder, these past few years.

He walked painfully the last yards and saw his rocker and cradle, and his gravel heap to be washed. He was a hardrock man, but one had to have supplies, to get down to the mother lode. He'd wash out a little more dust——

He suddenly stiffened. Some woodsman's sixth sense told him that something was wrong. Someone had been here. He searched, and found tell-tale scratches upon the ground. He searched further, and found footprints, incompletely erased. Bill!

Jake raged. Spying on him! He'd always hated Bill. Spying!

He worked that day in a fury. There would be a reckoning when they met that night. Spying! He'd shoot the liver out of the son of a gun!

And at nightfall he drained the cradle, picked out the last lumps of larger gravel, carefully swept off the remaining sand—and blinked. His clean up was

huge, for him. Five, six ounces or more! Maybe he'd struck a pocket, or the stream was going to be a bonanza or— He remembered the morning's discoveries. Bill——

The long hike home was a time of meditation. Bill, his enemy, salting his gravel pile to give him dust. Bill, who hated him. Bill, who had insulted him, whom he had insulted, every day for years.

He was walking firmly when he got to the place where he would meet Bill. He understood it all, now. Bill had seen his slim pack of supplies. Bill had thought, as he had thought of Bill, that he was unable to wash out enough dust to outfit himself for the winter. Bill had jerked meat for his own use, to spare the dust for a winter's supply of beans and flour and bacon for Jake, whom he hated.

Hated! They'd hated each other for years. Funny how they'd looked out for each other. Bill nursing him, defiantly. He mending Bill's mouth organ, venomously.

Bill was waiting. Bill was looking at him queerly.

Jake's eyes blazed. "You son of a gun!" he cried furiously. "Spying on me! Salting my gravel heap!" The fury suddenly died out of his voice. "Bill, what'd you do that for?"

And Bill, his enemy; Bill, with deep lines and weather marks upon his features; Bill, whose hair was white save that in a few narrowing spaces it was streaked with gray——Bill flushed a fiery, bricky red. He looked like a schoolboy, ashamed at having been caught.

He stammered, and then suddenly he burst out. "What'd you salt mine for? I'd a mind to kill you for it!"

Jake stared at him, helpless. His enemy— "I thought—" He stopped. "I lost most o' my dust in a poker game, last trip out. That's why my packs were light."

"So did I," Bill told him, defiantly. "I thought you weren't pannin' out."

They stared at each other, two old men, who had hated each other for years. Presently, Jake said slowly, "Bill, what'd we fuss about, anyway?"

"Durned if I know," said Bill angrily.

Silence again. After a long time Jake spoke once more. "Say, Bill," he said diffidently, "supposin' we both move in the Eyrie House? Needn't keep but one fire, then. Save time."

"I was thinkin' that myself," Bill grinned. "Say," he added suddenly. "Remember them card games we had when you were sick?"

Jake nodded. Bill rubbed his hands.

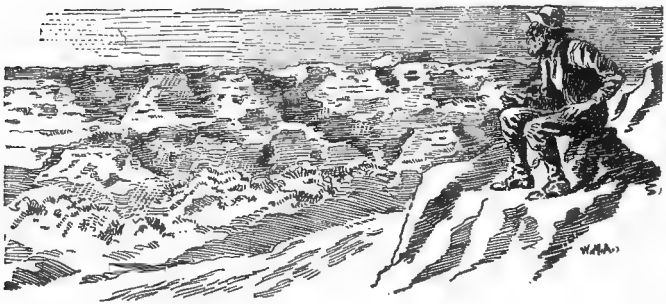
The next morning Bill rolled out of his blankets. Jake had just wakened and was staring up at the ceiling, happily. They were in the Eyrie House. Bill looked over at his ancient enemy.

"Howdy," he said maliciously.

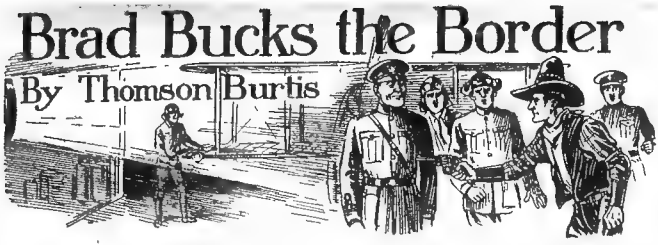
Jake gazed at him. It was a tense moment.

"You go to hell," he said recklessly, "you old son of a gun!"

And happiness, at that sign of amity, began to reign.



Brad Bucks the Border



By Thomson Burtis

Author of "Slim's Near-Biers," etc.

He was the sleepingest hombre in the border country, was Spears of the air patrol. But when a happy-go-lucky puncher ambled in on the McMullen flight, Lieutenant Spears sat up, and a sizeable portion of perdition began to pop along the Rio Grande.

DINNER was the one meal of the day whereat Lieutenant "Sleepy" Spears appeared to be wide awake enough to find the way from plate to mouth. This particular evening, as the depleted ranks of the McMullen flight of the border patrol gathered around the festive board in the messhall, Sleepy had a particularly bright sparkle in his eyes. The border patrol which the Air Service ran along the Rio Grande from gulf to gulf had had several active days. Prospects ahead were fo. still more activity—and the somnolent Spears, paradoxically, thrived on excitement or the anticipation thereof.

"Well," he was drawling pleasantly to Captain Kennard, the stocky little C. O. of the flight, "we've been doing a hell of a lot of aerial galloping, without rounding up one lonesome prisoner. That's going to give Slim and Tex a laugh——"

"Git up theuh, before I boot yuh up!" The words were half shouted in a soft, musical voice, and they came from the porch of the messhall.

Surprised silence fell over the nine khaki clad flyers and observers. Clumping footsteps sounded on the veranda floor, and Sleepy's eyes were veritable flames in his broad, peaceful face. The legend concerning him was that he rested all day in order to have energy enough for the night hours, which he loved. Likewise, that he opened an eye or two whenever the sun passed behind a cloud.

"Folluh yore nose," came that musical voice once more, the hint of a laugh in it, and the next second a man stumbled in the doorway and fell prone on the floor.

"Can I come in?" A tall figure filled the doorway, and a pair of level gray eyes that held dancing demons in them, surveyed the flyers without embarrassment.

Captain Kennard rose to the occasion. "Welcome," he stated, a puzzled smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "Who's your friend?"

Sleepy, along with the rest, got up to see. The man on the floor was an old Mexican, shabbily dressed in overalls, straw sombrero which had fallen off, and sporting one of the longest mustachios in captivity.

"Manny Valado!" exploded George Hickman. "What the hell are you up to, Manny?"

A perfect barrage of liquid Spanish shot forth from the old Mexican's lips, and as he talked he shakily got to his feet. Beady black eyes flashed hate as they flickered toward the stranger, but Manny was cringing.

"Oh, shut up!" cut in the stranger. "I jest found this old Spig, boys, sort o' sidesteppin' around a building next door here in a highly suspicious and uncommon manner. I figgered I might as well pick him up and bring him in, jest fur fun and excitement like. Know him?"

As the stranger was talking Sleepy was inspecting him closely, and with appreciation. He was still lounging easily in the doorway, a gun swinging in its holster at his waist and his ten gallon sombrero cocked rakishly on one side of his head.

Beneath it his deeply bronzed face was lean and square jawed. He was

very competent looking, but somehow he gave forth an aura of joyous, reckless youth. His narrow eyes were surrounded by tiny crinkles, and screened by drooping lids. Were it not for that reckless humor which seemed to radiate from his eyes and smiling, tight lipped mouth, his hawk nosed face would have been bold and hard. As it was, though, it was merely devil-may-care, and attractive in a craggy, masculine way.

He wore a gaudy handkerchief around his neck, and khaki trousers were tucked into elaborately embossed cowboy boots. His long legs were slightly bowed from the saddle, and from sombrero to boots he was of Texas.

"Sure we know him," Kennard answered his question. "He's an old fellow from McMullen—lives in a shack a half mile or so from the gate out here, in the Spig district. Maybe he's the bird that's been stealing our stuff, at that."

"Been losin' somethin'?" queried the stranger, rolling a cigarette expertly.

"A few personal things from the tents," nodded the C. O. "How about it, Manny?"

Another explosion of Spanish, which the stranger cut off as abruptly as before. "We ain't interested in any catalogue of the saints," he stated with tranquil humor. "Want tuh keep him around, Cap?"

"We'll see if he's got anything on him first," returned Kennard, and quickly searched the sullen, cringing old Mexican.

"Beat it for now, Manny," Kennard admonished him, after a fruitless search, "and if you're ever caught prowling around here again—" He didn't finish the sentence, letting stand the insinuation of unutterable punishment to torment the prowler.

Manny shuffled out as far as the door. There he turned and raised his clenched fist above his head. His brown eyes were hot coals in his greasy head as they rested on the stranger looming beside him. He started to curse, spitting forth the words venomously.

He got about six of them out when the stranger made his move. "Scat!" he thundered, and stamped his foot on the floor.

Manny went out the door as though jerked by a string.

SLEEPY grinned as he watched the unknown visitor walk forward, the hint of a swagger in his long limbed stride. There was just a suggestion of the theatrical in the sparkling stranger, all the way through. Wide leather wristbands, a brass studded belt of awe inspiring size, the set of his Stetson and poise of his head—but somehow it didn't seem out of character.

"I can't remember when I've met up with a bird that seemed to throw off as many sparks as this pelican does," Sleepy soliloquized.

"Any objection to me taking a bite or two?" inquired the Texan in his softly slurred speech. "By the way, my name's Seeley—Brad Seeley."

"Glad to know you," Kennard told him. "Meet the boys. Hickman, Spears, Cravath, Castleton, Bird, Ferry, and Miller."

"Shore tickled I run yuh down," observed Seeley, removing his hat and exhibiting coal black hair which was neatly parted on the side. "I been figurin' on comin' t' see yuh ever since I started hearin' so much about these here aerial rangers. Down in Mexico, even, I keep hearin' about yuh. Where's MacDowell an' Evans an' Jennings? Gone temporary, eh? Well, well."

He was utterly at his ease, and as his bright, narrow eyes wandered from face to face he was like a big, joyous youngster having the time of his life. When the Chink brought his food he dived in handsomely, and did not hesitate to use his knife as a means of transportation when the emergency seemed to warrant it.

Sleepy, sitting back, listening and watching, noticed that Ferry's thin, pinched face mirrored considerable contempt and disgust. Ferry was down from Donovan Field on temporary duty. The sudden emergency which had overtaken the patrol had found the McMullen flight with its ranks temporarily much depleted, so Ferry and Bird had been sent down to help out until the veterans got back.

"Ferry'll have a conniption fit," Sleepy thought with enjoyment. "He hasn't got over the fact that his tent hasn't got a private bath and furnace in it, yet."

"The funny part of it is," Seeley was saying, "that as long's I been aimin' tuh drop in an' visit yuh, it took business

tuh get me heuh. Right funny, eh?"

Interested silence fell over the table. Sleepy's eyes got brighter below their heavy, always half shut lids. He was a stocky, square faced young man, was Sleepy, and when his wide mouth smiled it seemed that his whole face was glowing softly. His brown hair was usually untidy, his clothing was always slightly awry, and he'd never been known to hurry except once in a while under great stress. Then he moved fast enough to make up for a year's loafing. Were he to be informed that he had just become the possessor of one million dollars, he'd have said calmly, "Is that so? Then I'll buy a drink."

Now that the stranger had his hat off, his previously humorous face was more boyish than before. And there was a curious effect of one-sidedness—his left eyebrow seemed to slope downward more sharply over the corner of his eye, and the mouth to droop at the left corner. Likewise, there was a deep cut line around that corner of his lips, and none on the other side. If he'd had a chew of tobacco in his mouth on that side, he'd have been positively lopsided, was Sleepy's judgment.

"Just what business've you got with us?" Spears queried gently. "You're not a ranger or anything, are you?"

Seeley smiled that flashing smile—and looked about eighteen for a second. "Nope. I'm jest a puncher. Worked around all through Texas fur five years, and been down in Mexico fur the last couple."

Tall, lanky, thin faced Ferry, who, it was apparent, had taken no fancy to the stranger, raised his thin voice. "Not of necessity, I trust?" he asked, smiling superciliously.

Sleepy turned away to hide a grin. Ferry was a queer bird, a studious, ascetic, cultured chap who'd swum in the social waves of Boston's Back Bay since a minnow. He held to himself, read highbrow books, sought to keep in touch with "higher things," and was in the army, Sleepy was convinced, because he considered the profession of arms one of the few occupations extant by which a gentleman might make a living. And yet he wasn't a bad fellow underneath—a poor flyer, but with a world of nerve.

As his hand picked Boston accent reached Brad Seeley that young gentleman's bronzed face suddenly lighted up, and those two humorous devils in his eyes became very prominent. "Aoh, nao," he said with elaborate accentuation. "I assuah you, nao!"

Then, as he caught the contemptuous look in Ferry's light blue eyes, the rider suddenly changed. In a flash his bold face was bleak and hard, and his body was tense as he leaned across the table. "Seriously speakin'," he said slowly, "that's none of yore damn' business!"

The silence was taut, packed with sudden menace. Ferry, his long thin face composed and his eyes unfaltering, was looking at Seeley as he might have at some curious, repulsive freak.

It was Seeley who broke the silence, and eased the tension by leaning back and flashing a smile around the table. "Shouldn't be surprised if this felluh was new tuh the border, huh? Well, anyway, I was in Mexico, and I starts north right away as soon's I hear, through luck, that Goldy More, the yella skunk, has gone and shot old man Tamerton. Hear about that damn' outrage? It's got the front pages, so I s'pose yuh have."

He was looking at Sleepy, and that alert pilot, filled with an interest in the stranger which he could not fathom, nodded. "I'll say we have. Just another thing to add to the misfortunes of life. Not satisfied with making us fly about a million patrols, day and night, to stop this sudden smuggling wave, we've had to go batting around over the mesquite trying to pick up this Goldy More and his piebald horse."

"That's him," stated Seeley. "He was——"

"The worst of it is," little Pete Miller interjected, "that's far as I can see there isn't anybody much that wants to get him. If this old Tamerton hadn't been county boss, and close to State boss, I doubt whether this young Goldy'd be chased at all to amount to anything. Now, though, with the El Paso and Dallas and San Antone papers raising hell——"

"They oughta!" flashed Seeley, rolling a cigarette as his eyes swept the board. "So everybody sympathizes with Goldy, do they? Gosh, how that good fur nothin' hombre's got folks buffaloed! Always did have, and always will, I guess. No-account, but plumb lucky thataway."

"Knew him, did you?" queried Ken-

nard. "Well, he's certainly got away slick and clean. We've combed the mesquite and the border for him, plenty. And old Sheriff Trowbridge and the Rangers and everybody likewise. Got to. But the dope we have around here is that old Tamerton was a miserly, hot tempered, heartless old crook, and that this Goldy More was a hell of a nice fellow. Whale of a good rodeo performer, wasn't he? Anyhow, the shooting seemed justified, in a way, if rumors are true. But being Tamerton, ex-Senator and all that, naturally the deadwood falls automatic."

"That's bunk!" Seeley said positively, a queer flicker in his eyes. "I'm up here of my own free will and accord, because I think I may know where he's hidin'. I got a old grudge tuh settle with him, and I'll do it. He's got the wool pulled over everybody's eyes—always has had, on account o' his oily tongue and his looks and him bein' a good rodeo hand. And I kin tell yuh plenty about old Tamerton, too, which'll go tuh show that he wasn't near so bad as he was painted. The only time Goldy More'd shoot anybody'd be when the other man didn't have a chance, believe me, and he wouldn't fight with his fists unless it was a cripple. Listen. Goldy——"

"Say, was this the business you had with us?" queried Kennard.

The little C. O., with his square face marked by no less than twenty-three airplane wrecks, hadn't got the reputation of being the best squadron commander on the border by neglecting any openings for service whatever.

"No," returned Seeley, and drew on his cigarette with slow enjoyment. "That's only personal business. This other's right up yore alley, prob'ly."

SOMEHOW, as he sat there, the magnetism of the man was like a tangible thing. He radiated energy and careless delight in life as he lived it, and graven in his young-old face there were experience and competence, and the confidence which comes from such a combination. Apparently he enjoyed being the center of the stage, as well.

"Well, shoot," barked the captain, all business now. "We're supposed to be here for a purpose, you know."

"Shore," nodded Seeley, looking at the battered alarm clock on the shelf, "but there's plenty of time. However, here goes. Down there Chihuahua way in Spigland, I runs into some hombres and one thing an' another happens. I hears some things which mebbe is true—an' mebbe ain't. Yo' fellas can judge."

He stopped to puff again, and Sleepy saw his eyes resting on Ferry's, and they were literally aflame. Ferry's nose, metaphorically speaking, was in the air, and his eyes did not reflect any admiration for the flight's guest.

"Funny how Ferry dislikes him so quick," thought Sleepy. "But I don't know anybody he really likes, at that."

"Anyway," resumed Seeley, "I happened to hear by accident that a gang's been runnin' over an awful lot o' dope lately. Know anything about it?"

"*Know* anything about it!" rasped Kennard. "We're rambling wrecks trying to fly twenty-four hours a day to stop 'em!"

Suddenly all the flyers were as alert as so many hounds before the leash is sprung.

"No luck, eh?" pursued Seeley, hunching up a bit from his easy slouch.

"Not a bit—and San Antone flooded with the stuff."

"Well, I got an idee—sorta two an' two makes five kinda idee—of what's gonna happen within the next two'r three nights. Ten to one, tonight. Big shipment comin' over. And about where, though not exactly. But I know that country like a book. So I figured I'd tell yuh about it; you could fly down thataway sometime before midnight—they work from three to five, near's I can tell—and I'd go along with yuh t' help yuh find the place."

"Where is it?" snapped the captain.

The young Texan's mouth widened in that flashing smile. "I' tell yuh the truth, Cap, I ain't never had a ride and I want one, *bad!* I didn't aim t' tell yuh until yuh promised me I could go along!"

"Huh?" exploded the captain, and even Sleepy had to stare.

"That goes as it lays, suh!"

Kennard relaxed. "You're one of the queerest coots I ever saw," he ruminated dryly. "But you can help us, at that. All right, you get your ride, and I hope you don't break your neck."

"Tonight?"

"Tonight."

"Then it's only sixty-five miles from here, five miles this side o' that big V-bend. Where the woods on both sides come clean down to the water—remember? Now don't git me wrong. This ain't no certainty. I jest overheard this and got a hint about that, and poked around a little, one way'n another, but what you said about there bein' a real smugglin' wave makes it seem like I wasn't dreamin' none."

"I'll say you're not. Wait till I get Sheriff Trowbridge on the phone. He'll come right out, and we can get together. Boy, it'd sure be a relief to grab off that mob!"

Which sentiment was echoed by them all—except, possibly, Sleepy. Sleepy now was feeling very mellow and at rights with the world. A night of excitement loomed ahead, which was very pleasant. But at that, if they nabbed the bunch life would settle down into the rut again——

"Because you personally hate this Goldy More, I presume that the entiah state of Texas is fohced to shaih your opinion?"

"No—but if yuh knew him yuh would," Seeley replied to Ferry, and somehow the light in his eyes changed again. "And say, you——"

Sleepy got to his feet slowly as Seeley, his eyes fixed on Ferry, leaned across the table. "Don't start ridin' me, mister," he drawled equably. "I'm just a stranger heuh, but I don't aim to be takin' things said in that tone o' voice."

Ferry sniffed. "The bold bad man of the West," he said in his precise, maddeningly supercilious way. "At any time I contemplate being told what to do by one of you——"

"That's funny!"

It was Captain Kennard's voice in the doorway, and Sleepy knew that for the moment at least, the C. O.'s arrival had postponed an unpleasant showdown between two men with an instinctive antipathy for one another—and with no disposition to back down.

"Neither the office phone nor the barracks line'll work," stated Kennard. "That looks like somewhat of a coincidence to me."

"Dirty work at the crossroads?" inquired Sleepy gently, but his eyes were glowing warmly. A tingle was chasing itself up and down his broad back.

He moved slowly around the table in his usual slouching manner. To the casual eye it was merely a lazy progress. To the discerning observer, though, there was a smooth, effortless, panther-like grace in every movement which bespoke well trained muscles under perfect control. Sleepy was a most misleading young man. When stripped his muscles could be seen flowing under the skin of a powerful torso like so many steel snakes. When dressed, he was merely a stocky, lazy, flabby looking pilot.

"I don't know," Kennard said tersely, "but it looks funny to me. I don't know any reason that anyone on earth would have to cut our telephone wires."

"Mebbe the old Spig, fur meanness," suggested Seeley.

As though that suggestion had taken all the joy out of life, the flyers relaxed. For a second Sleepy was broken hearted. Then, remembering that aside from a telephone mystery, there was another little matter looming ahead, he became himself again.

"Just like a Spig," nodded Kennard. "I don't know and can't conceive why Manuel was prowling around here, at that. That stall about getting wood didn't sound so well. He's always been an inoffensive old fellow.

"Anyhow, Sleepy, I told Cary to get out the ships and have 'em all ready to go. Sent Buchanan to the nearest phone to get Trowbridge and bring him out here.

"The next question is, how early shall we start, and how close can we get without warnin' 'em."

"I don't think yuh need t' worry, suh," interrupted Seeley. "From what I found out in Halovia they don't get close to the borduh until it's time tuh cross, t' avoid bein' spotted. An' they got about twenty in the gang, jest fur protection in case o' trouble. They don't go beyond the borduh. They figger on gettin' across jest before dawn, and I shouldn't wonder if they had some hidin' place for the carriers t' lay ovuh in fur the day."

"I wonder how they get it north," ruminated the captain.

"Search me. An' this may be a bust, yuh know. I'm talkin' like I know everything, but yuh savvy I'm jest puttin' things tuhgether——"

"Sure. Twenty, eh? We'll see how many men the sheriff's got near by, radio the Laredo flight to be on hand, and see what we can do. Pete, go in the operations room and see what the nearest landing field is. Wonderful moon—won't be any trouble——"

Two loud thuds hit the porch, and the next instant scrawny, lantern jawed Sergeant Carey was in the doorway, so excited he failed to salute. "Cap'n! Every ship in the hangar's been bashed in—elevators or wings or somethin'. And they was O. K. at six this evenin'."

FIGHT tanned airmen leaped to their feet and a chorus of barked questions came from their throats. Suddenly the air was electric, and in the flash of their eyes and the set of their heads there were obvious the qualities in them which had brought them to the border patrol. Not a man there but knew that something sinister and menacing was in wait for them—and all of them welcomed it with ferocious joy.

Sleepy's eyes, as the gang ran out toward the hangars, were focussed on the forgotten Brad Seeley. The broad shouldered young puncher was one living flame. His eyes were lines of blinding light in his mahogany face, his head was back and his white teeth exposed in a smile of pure delight. "Boy, didn't I pick me a night!" he chuckled to Sleepy. "Let's go. Doggoned if I don't wish I was a flyer."

Bathed in the radiance of a full Texas moon, the ships were being trundled to the line. Sleepy wasted but little time on them—either the elevators or the wings of each of them had been tampered with. In the case of the elevators, a foot had crashed through, smashing each. On some ships only holes had been ripped in the wings. But someone, for some reason, had deliberately damaged those ships and put them, for major or minor causes, out of commission.

"The question is," Sleepy was saying tranquilly to the captain, "whether this is revenge—or done to keep these ships out of service tonight!"

"I've got four men on the way for Manuel now," Kennard said briefly. "That was a bright stunt, letting him go. But I'm damned, Sleepy, if I don't believe that the idea of this thing, whether Manuel did it or not, was to keep them out of commission. 'Specially in view of what Seeley brought in."

"It may be that this smart smuggling gang got wind of the fact that Seeley was coming here, and just figured to take no chances," put in Clipper Castleton. "Or it may be that they just didn't want to take any chances anyway."

"Or that there's somethin' entirely different from smugglin'—or my partik'ler smugglin' party, anyhow," said Seeley, and there was a laugh in his voice. "Looks like there was hell poppin' on the border, don't it?"

As he stood there, sombrero on the back of his head and eyes flashing in the moonlight, he was the incarnation of the joyous adventurer.

"He thinks this is put on for his special benefit," grinned Sleepy to himself, and that made him at one with the airmen.

"Two to one you're right," agreed Kennard. "It was done by an amateur, though, if the idea was to disable the ships. Those slashed wings can be sewed in a jiffy. Elevators can be replaced, but it'll take time. Should have smashed whole tail surfaces. Thanks to your arrival, Seeley, we've discovered it all in time. On a hurry call, we'd have been helpless."

"Everybody over here!" he barked, and mechanics and officers came running. Even Major Searles, wizened, kindly old flight surgeon, came meandering from his tent to see what the shouting was about.

"Spears! Get together with Cary and see how quickly these can be fixed and how many spare elevators we've got. Miller, go to the radio shack, have detail wire the Laredo flight, and instruct them to start patrolling the full sector until we get started. Castleton! Get the guards together."

Sleepy didn't take long. He couldn't help Cary, who knew more about the McMullen supplies, ships, and motors than all the officers in it put together. Five ships would be ready to go in one hour if no other damage was detected in inspection, according to the non-com.

As Sleepy emerged from the stockroom in one of the gaunt iron hangars he gazed over the moonlit airdrome with great enjoyment. To the south the line of frame buildings and the rows of tents; to east and west corrugated iron

hangars looming blackly; northward a fence, some open fields, and then the crowding vanguard of the hundred and fifty mile desert of mesquite stretching north and west. On the line, blurred in the moonlight, a group of flyers. Hurrying mechanics, carrying tools and supplies—then the landing searchlights came on and threw the whole scene into vivid relief. They were examining the guards now, and Sleepy walked fast, for once, to hear it.

That there was more afoot than what Seeley had expected seemed reasonable, to him. Never before had such a thing happened at McMullen. And what enterprise was so large that the heads of it were willing to dare what they had dared, to be sure of no interference? They must have known their ground intimately, too. The gate guards were the only ones on until midnight, after which one guard patrolled each set of hangars, more for form's sake than anything else. It was an illustration, though, of what might happen to the patrolmen, out there on their little patch of sand four miles from town, with the chaparral crowding it, and rescue far away.

"Yessir—only him—that's all we seen, until Manuel came out," a guard was repeating doggedly. "And we didn't hear no noise from the hangars. Manuel must o' sneaked in from the other end."

"He must o' done it," asseverated the other private.

"Where did you find him?" snapped Kennard to Seeley.

"Alongside o' headquarters—if that's what yuh call that little shack—in the shaduh, peakin' in the winduh."

"If Manuel did it he'd be crazy to be caught sneaking around," Kennard said positively.

"Seeley—this felluh here—walked down toward the hangars a little ways, but jest looked around a second and went right toward the messhall and went out o' sight toward headquarters," the guard stated. "And he didn't come back, or we'd seen him."

From the rear of the group Ferry's precise, well modulated tones carried clearly. "Anyone could have come in from the north and done the work," he stated. "Even Seeley, and then come in the gate, being a stranger, to avoid suspicion. Of course, I am not insinuating——"

Sleepy was prepared for what happened, though he couldn't fathom the obvious dislike, amounting almost to hatred, which had been aroused in Ferry's classic breast by the impudent cowpuncher. He leaped forward, just as Seeley tore his way through the first row of men.

He was not quite in time. Something gleamed in the beams of the searchlight, and before anyone but Sleepy could make a move the cowboy had his gun jammed into the ribs of the icily cool Boston man.

"You'd better not 'insinuate,' you horse faced, washed out, glue tongued Boston wharf rat!" he snarled, and his profile was etched against the light as he bit off the words.

It was ruthless and cruel—from tightened mouth to slitlike eyes and jutting nose, the countenance of a bird of prey ready for the kill.

For a split second Sleepy was brought up short by the transformation he had seen. Then, before the rest got their wits, he had his. Ferry, the human iceberg, could have recited Plato in the face of death, and snubbed a man he disliked if that man had an axe suspended over his head.

Sleepy moved like a rattlesnake making his kill. A darting hand, from behind—and the gun was twisted from the raging cowman's hand.

Seeley turned like a shot, lips drawn back in a snarl, but his own gun was poked into his ribs.

"Shut up, you damn' fool," Sleepy said with deadly gentleness. "Who told you to start gunplay around here?"

Seeley drew himself up, and his head went back and his white teeth flashed in a mirthless smile. "Nobody. I'm jest a guest heuh," he drawled. "An' it's my understandin' o' Texas—not Boston—customs that a guest ain't tuh be insulted. This white eyed baby heuh dislikes me. That's his privilege. Speakin' personal, I'm complimented. But if he makes another mistake like that last one, I'll kill him if I have tuh trail him from heuh to El Paso!"

He whirled to face Kennard. "Kick me out o' heuh, suh, and I'll go. But that last goes as it lays, for any man livin'!"

"That's poppycock," Kennard stated rudely. "We're not going to kick you out, though. No gunplay—we'll check your gun at the door, so to speak. Ferry, be careful how you use your tongue when you've got no concrete evidence to back you up. You're not arguing in the Harvard Club down here. Seeley made a damn' fool of himself, and that goes double for you."

The tall, fair Boston man did not wince, but a slow flush rose in his lean cheeks, until the hollows under the cheekbones were splashes of crimson.

SLEEPY relaxed. Perhaps he'd been unduly impressed, but if ever in his life he'd felt the swish of the wings of death, he had in that instant when the gun was jammed into Ferry's side and the flyer had been on the verge of making one of his stinging, sarcastic remarks. "He couldn't talk reasonably with a man who ate with his knife," Sleepy reflected.

In very low tones he said to Seeley, "You pretty nearly got the noose around your neck that time, old-timer. You're not dealing with peons in Mexico around here, and you'd better watch your step."

Seeley, outwardly tranquil, gazed down at the stocky, somnolent looking airman, and Sleepy could fairly feel the electric vitality of the man crackling out at him. Then Seeley drawled equably, "You done right. So did I. Ferry done wrong. That's all there is to it. I take that from nobody."

With dazzling abruptness his smile flashed forth. "Say, how about me flyin' with you tonight?"

"O. K. with me. See the cap," Sleepy returned. "You've got a fine ride coming for the first one."

Automobile headlights gleamed and a car pulled up before headquarters. Kennard called, "This must be the sheriff. All right, everybody to headquarters. Come along, you guards. You, too, Seeley."

"Beatrice Grantham's car," opined Castleton, himself in the throes of being engaged to a McMullen girl and consequently posted on all automobiles used by the fair sex. "Having a big night, aren't you, Ferry?" the youngster added with a grin.

Just because the flight knew that Ferry considered it very bad taste to bring a girl into a conversation in any manner, the unregenerate flyers always seized the opportunity to razz Ferry on his courtship—for that was what it amounted to. Ferry was totally ununderstandable. Why he should be a flyer in the Air Service was as much of a mystery to the rest of the airmen as the newcomer's Greek books were—and why the man should have been attracted by a wholesome, frank, out-of-doors girl who probably hadn't read a book since high school was equally annoying to figure.

"She's Ferry's girl?" chuckled Seeley as the group strode across the airdrome.

Not a word more did he say, but there were many insinuations in his words. The irrepressible cowpuncher might as well have stated that he'd like to see a girl who liked the man. Or possibly a girl who could make Ferry's heart increase a beat.

Ferry held his peace, to Sleepy's relief.

"What's all this?" boomed a thundering voice, and six feet four of bone and muscle, totalling two hundred and fifty pounds on the hoof, moved across the sand to meet them. "Just got yore message—been out on a false trail fur this Goldy More. What's up?"

Kennard told the entire story in a few terse sentences. Ferry's lanky figure was draped over the car, standing in front of headquarters.

Sheriff Bill Trowbridge, of Hidalgo County, stroked his iron gray mustache, and rumbled deep "hums" from his massive chest. The gargantuan old-timer—cowboy, ranger, finally sheriff—had been a friend of the airmen since first the border patrol had started, and in many a hot spot the patrol and the sheriff had worked together for the good of the State and the honor of the law. "C'mon in," he bellowed. "Let's hear jest what Seeley's got tuh say. Looks tuh me like there's more up than that there jest possible crossin' at the V-bend. Likewise looks like I git a ride tuhnight, eh?"

The veteran borderman never missed a chance for a hop, and could think up more excuses for one than an army man could alibis, as Sleepy told Seeley.

"I'm getting restless," exploded Pete Miller. "I'm afraid something's going on somewhere, but we can't go without ships."

"Looks like a right nice evenin'," stated Seeley. "But supposin' there is somethin' up—how yuh gonna find it out? Shipe'll scare 'em if yuh patrol."

"The fact that they had special designs on our ships means it's in our territory, which reduces it to a hundred and fifty miles," Sleepy pointed out. "Even less, figuring Laredo as taking their share of the sector. And *their* ships are all right, or we'd have heard."

"Gosh! *Only* a hundred and fifty, says he!" And for a second the shining eyed Seeley was almost serious, as it was borne in on him how these riders of the air cast off all shackles, practically speaking, of time and distance.

Sheriff Trowbridge was waiting, facing the door, as Sleepy and Brad brought up the rear. "Who're you, where'd yuh come from, and what d'yuh know in detail, son?" boomed the borderman, and his puckered eyes probed into the puncher's like gimlets.

"May I come in?" a voice came from the doorway.

"Shore! Bee's was the first car I could get, boys."

It was tall, smiling Beatrice Grantham, followed by Ferry. She wasn't beautiful, but the glow of health in her lightly tanned cheeks, and the frankness of her really fine eyes, and the smile on her rather wide mouth combined to make the athletic looking Texas girl a far from unpleasant vision. She wore a light coat and carried gauntlets, and her unbobbed, red-gold hair was in tantalizing disarray.

"May I present Mr. Seeley, Miss Grantham?" Sleepy introduced them.

Seeley, with that hint of theatricalism which could be detected in him at times, swept his sombrero down in a deep bow. "How do you do, ma'am—it's a pleasure," he drawled, eyes alight. "It's been more'n a year since I met a girl like you, and I'm shore tickled."

She laughed without embarrassment and gave him her hand. As she did so, Sleepy saw her flash a look at Ferry. There was an element of flashing defiance in it.

"Ten to one they had a scrap out there at the car," Sleepy reflected with an inward chuckle. "Now she'll give him the works."

"If someone'd start that phonograph, I'd shore consider it a treat tuh have my first dance in more'n a year," Seeley stated.

"Here, here," chuckled Trowbridge, "there's business afoot. Come clean, Seeley."

There was no chuckle in the last words, and suddenly the room fell silent. A magazine table, phonograph, piano, easy chair, pictures and cups on the walls—it was a typical men's club room, and somehow it seemed incongruous to think that within fifteen minutes the officers gathered there would be high above the sleeping earth on perilous duty.

"Yore name's Brad Seeley?"

The puncher stood in the middle of the circle, facing the huge sheriff. Light shining on his black hair, head back—there was something utterly untamed about him as he said, "No, but that'll do."

Sleepy'sc eyelids rose in amazement. Trust the kid to choose his time for creating a sensation. He'd glanced at Beatrice when he said that.

"So-o-o? Well, what is it?"

"Nobody's business."

"The hell it ain't! Look here, youngster. Yo're a total stranger, and there's been a lot happened tuhnight. Lookin' fur Goldy More as we been, I know the pedigree of every stranger in McMullen—except you. Yo're jest about one inch from jail on suspicion right now."

"That'd be the dumbest thing you ever did," the unimpressed Texan shot back. "Be yoreself, Sheriff—that don't sound like the limb o' the law I been hearin' about for some time.

"Listen. I come up from Mexico tuh settle accounts with Goldy More. If I don't wanta use my right name, it's my business. I come here tuh this flight tuh do 'em a favor, and I've done it already. Suspectin' me o' that ship business is plumb ridiculous, and you-all know it. Why, they'd be playin' poker here, knowin' nothing whatever about anything, if it wasn't fur me."

The sheriff grinned below his sweeping gray mustache. "I see I can't bluff yuh," he rumbled. "Let that go. Now what did yuh find out in Mexico?"

Brad repeated the vague story substantially as he'd reported it at first.

He was concluding it when the door opened and Corporal Connor saluted. "Finally found Manuel, sir. Stabbed

to death, layin' alongside a little shack next tuh his own."

"Report it to my office?" roared the sheriff.

"Yessir. One o' your deputies was on the job, and the police, too."

THERE was a moment of silence. Beatrice Grantham's face was slightly pale, her eyes wide and shadowed. The airmen looked at one another helplessly. Sleepy felt an increased warmth within him, and his heart beat a bit faster. And, in the center, Brad Seeley looked as though a white-hot fire within him was shining through his eyes, and glowing dully through his body.

"May mean everythin' or nothin', an' there's no time tuh find out," Trowbridge said rapidly. "Manuel might o' been stabbed by some other Spig; or he mighta done this job on the ships and been killed by the gang fur some reason—any reason from makin' sure he'd keep his mouth shut, on up. When'll the ships be ready, Cap'n?"

"Half an hour at the outside, Sheriff."

"I've already sent word to my man at Carana tuh be on the lookout. Likewise four other hombres I know, up and down the river. But what in hell tuh look for, or where, I'm darned if I know!"

Whereat Sleepy Spears took a hand. His brain had been working like the well oiled machine it was, and he'd reached various and divers conclusions. "Listen, Sheriff," he said in his gentle, lazy way. "It's a cinch we've got to leave out ordinary revenge in this matter. The ships might have been bashed in for that reason by someone, including Manuel, with a grudge against us. But we can't figure on it."

"Shore."

"It seems to me utterly nonsensical to think that the gang of smugglers Brad here spotted, planning to run some stuff over sixty-five miles down, would engineer it. Of course, under ordinary conditions, after the hangars were closed we'd never have found out about the ships until time to use 'em. But no smugglers—ordinary smugglers working at night and sixty-five miles away—would have done the job. They had nothing whatever to gain—we'd never spot 'em without a tip—and everything to lose. There'd always be a chance of our discovering the damage, then absolutely know something was up tonight, and crab their game. So I think we can leave those fellows out, and let the Laredo flight handle 'em, if they come."

"What do you figure?" barked Kennard.

When Sleepy Spears got under way on a given undertaking, there was no man, including Sheriff Trowbridge, who didn't respect him as sincerely as they laughed at him when he was "resting."

"Well, the Laredo flight wasn't hurt any. That means, to me, that if anything's coming off, it's coming off closer to us than to Laredo. Which means the territory between the Gulf and halfway to Laredo, and part o' that far eastern stuff can be cut off, too."

"Sounds reasonable."

"And something must be scheduled which they figure has a good chance of being discovered, and a tip getting to us. Otherwise they wouldn't have gone to the great pains of putting us out of commission for pursuit."

"Say on!" commanded Kennard as Sleepy stopped for breath, and Sleepy did as he was bid.

When he'd finished he left his audience in a state of astonishment which bordered on coma.

Finally Sheriff Trowbridge shook his head regretfully. "Looks like I can't ride tuhnight," he stated. "Sleepy, I believe yo're right. Dumb as I am, I'd never thought of it. But you must be right. And with Manuel dead and you bein' all strung out like yuh gotta be, that ain't no place fur me. Might as well be here."

"Looks reasonable to me," stated Kennard. "Connor! Tell Schulz to get the big signal rockets out—a dozen of 'em. Two to a ship. Harwell, have the radio sergeant send out these messages."

He dropped into a chair at the table, and wrote messages to Laredo and Donovan. The Laredo flight were to handle the possible affair at the V-bend; Donovan Field pilots were to stand by all night long, ships ready.

"Well, we got fifteen minutes or so tuh wait, eh?" remarked Seeley. "Gosh, I wish we could git started."

"Better think twice," warned Ken-

nard. "I'll keep my word—but this may be a lot different from the little affair we figured on."

"And I can fly with Spears here?"

Kennard threw up his hands. "Sure."

The pilots were uneasy, waiting for the time to go. Sheriff Trowbridge bent his puckered old eyes on Brad, who had drifted toward Beatrice. Ferry, evidently in a white fury, was giving her no attention whatever. "So you've got a grudge against Goldy More, have yuh?" Trowbridge inquired. "Shore that five thousand reward the Tamerton are offerin' ain't responsible?"

"Reward?"

Seeley's astonishment was so genuine that the sheriff had to chuckle. "Shore. Out tuhday, and those Tamertons, havin' all that money, will prob'ly increase it. It's shore got all Texas by the ears, that shootin'. What kind of a felluh d'yuh reckon this Goldy tuh be? Got his name on account of a gold tooth, didn't he?"

"Uh-huh," grunted Seeley. "Fellow about my height, blond, fairly good lookin' and thinks he's the world's best in looks as in everything. A fourflushin', double crossin', bootlickin' picture cowboy."

"That's all swill!" bellowed the sheriff. "He's one o' the best all 'round hands ever come out o' Texas. Ropin', bulldoggin', wranglin'—anything."

There was an unreadable look in Seeley's eyes as he shrugged his shoulders. "Right—when he's in front of a crowd. For a crowd he'd break his neck any time. When he's on his own, with nobody watchin' much, he's yelluh. I ain't sayin' a word more. Yuh can size me up any way yuh want. But when I say that I'm on this side o' the river tuh run him down I mean it, and yuh can draw yore own conclusions about 'im. I could tell yuh stories, but I ain't aimin' to."

"Well, I don't know him, but I've heard plenty," declared the sheriff. "All Texas, in private, hopes he gits away. Tamerton—the old man—got his start stealin' everybody's cattle, and has lived by that method ever since. And he's done tricks that he'd ought tuh've been tarred and feathered fur, years ago. I'm tryin' like hell tuh capture this Goldy—yore description of him is exact—because I gotta. So's everybody else. I believe he'll go scot free, anyway. But he's runnin' against the Tamerton money and influence on the trial, and I don't blame the boy for not standin' it if he kin help it."

Pete Miller was gazing out the window every second to watch progress, and the other flyers, on the *qui vive*, listened to the colloquy as though it relaxed their tight nerves. Beatrice Grantham, who'd been pale and drawn and very nervous, seemed to feel a bit more normal as she said, "I saw him ride once at the Fort Worth rodeo. He was wonderful."

"Yes, ma'am," Seeley said, those perverse mocking devils dancing in his narrow eyes and his face a bit more whimsically one sided than ever as the left corner of his mouth drooped lower. "The ladies always liked him. How about that dance while we're waitin'? I'd admire to——"

"Cap'n!" It was Private First Class Harwell at the door. "Here's Daly, sir," stuttered the soldier. "I found him all tied up back of the radio shack, and the set busted all to hell—sir!"

Slim, fiery little Daly, a red headed terrier of an Irishman, swept Harwell to one side and fairly exploded into the room. "*Two* of 'em, sor! Me back was tur-rned, and they gits me, the scum, binds and gags me, and leaves me afther breakin' the set t' smithereens. Masked they was, and dhressed like soldiers."

The raving non-com went on, but he'd told the essentials. The radio shack was somewhat isolated—it had been child's play, as Sleepy pointed out. "Dressed like soldiers to avoid suspicion in case they were seen at a distance in the darkness," he went on. "Twenty minutes ago—that means they're over the river by now. Did they see men working on the ships?"

"No, sor, I don't think so."

"Here comes Cary," yelled Pete Miller. "All aboard that's going aboard!"

THEY lost no time. The set had been smashed to prevent communication with any other flight of the border patrol, as with the cut wires. The sheriff would try to get a phone call through to both Laredo and Donovan—that was the best which could be done. Laredo ships were already pa-

trolling, anyway, and understood about the prospects at the V-bend.

Brad Seeley, so called, stopped beside Beatrice Grantham. Ferry was in the doorway, Sleepy alongside him. "I'm comin' back fur that dance, ma'am," he told her, and she nodded and smiled a mirthless smile.

She did not look at Ferry. His light blond hair was parted precisely in the middle, as always, and his full uniform was as impeccable as his manicured nails, but there was raw murder in his eyes.

In the flooding moonlight the five great De Haviland bombers were bellowing on the warm up, like beasts of the night in full cry. Long plumes of fire trailed from the exhaust pipes as the twelve cylinder Libertys strove to drag the ships loose from the blocks that held their wheels. The moon rode high in a cloudless sky, and silvered the limitless stretches of mesquite which hemmed in the little airdrome. To the east the lights of McMullen flared against the sky, but westward the primeval wilderness stretched away for fifteen hundred miles to the Pacific—that fifteen hundred miles which included the Big Bend, the Rockies, the flaming deserts—all that the border has come to mean.

Somewhere out there was what they were seeking.

It was one of the moments which kept Sleepy Spears in the Air Service, and rewarded him for what he was losing by it. Northward there were cities and villages and theatres and hotels—and he preferred to be a border patrolman.

Helmets and goggles for the two of them in his hand, Sleepy ran alongside the tall puncher, toward the line. There Captain Kennard called him. "Sleepy! Pete! George!"

They gathered—the real veterans. The C. O. ran his fingers through his spikelike pompadour, leather coat hanging open and night glasses in his hand. "Castleton's all right, but inexperienced, Ferry and Bird I don't know about. It's up to us three to take care of them, Hickman and I, Pop and Pete, you by yourself, Sleepy. For God's sake try to keep 'em out of trouble. Wish Tex and Slim were here."

And Sleepy was lonesome, too. This was a night such as those two would have crawled from their temporary northern station to McMullen to live through.

Sleepy led Seeley over to the roaring DeHaviland they were to ride, and the group of old-timers walked alongside. They ranged in size from Peewee Pete Miller to gigantic George Hickman, best observer of the Army Air Service; and in physical appearance from Clip Castleton's handsomeness to Captain Kennard's scarred homeliness. But there was a curious kinship in those bronzed faces, a level look about the eyes and a clear quality in them which told of death faced more than once, and cheated. Reckless youth and steady age were curiously commingled—airmen all.

They scattered to their ships as Sleepy pointed out the Lewis machine-gun on its scarf mount around the rear cockpit. "Here's how to use it," he stated, and showed the Texan the way to handle it. "I've got guns on the cowling there that shoot through the propellor. We may have to use 'em all. If we do, you handle this. But listen——"

His suddenly piercing gray eyes bored into Seeley's, and his wide mouth was straight and tight. "None of your monkeyshines, understand? Make a move without my telling you, and I'll knock you cuckoo with this wrench."

He showed the big steel socket wrench to the rider. "Get me?"

Seeley nodded. "You're on yore own ground, and I savvy," he said simply, and he did not seem like the devil-may-care youth of the recreation hall.

Sleepy strapped the observer's belt around him, and got into his own cockpit as the mechanic got out. The din was deafening as helmeted heads bent over their lighted instruments and the pilots' fingers edged their throttles forward and the four hundred and fifty horse power motors went into full cry. Dust rose in swirling spirals, and the tail men leaned against the blast. Sleepy's instrument board needles were vibrating at their proper places as his accustomed eyes inspected oil pressure, air pressure, battery charging rate, temperature, rotations per minute—all the minutiæ of that thundering motor ahead. Spark advanced, altitude lever set, shutters open, gas lever turned to the main tank, radio antenna wound, fire extinguisher in place; the D. H. was ready to go. Sleepy got the goggles over his eyes, and followed Captain

Kennard as the line of ships crawled across the airdrome like monstrous night bugs.

Sleepy swung his ship with rudder and stick as he reached the fence, just as Captain Kennard took off. The next second Sleepy's motor was wide open, his right hand was braced against the stick, and the bomber, nose down, scudded across the hard packed sand. Three quarters of the way across the field he eased back on the stick, and then held the ship close to the ground for excess speed. At ninety-five miles an hour he brought the nose up smoothly, and the D. H. angled upward and over the buildings.

Pete Miller and Ferry and Clipper Castleton followed as the lead ships circled the field. Castleton immediately swung eastward; his station was fifty miles down toward Brownsville, although nobody believed that anything would happen in that more thickly settled section. As the other two caught the lead ships by cutting across the field, Sleepy throttled the Liberty to fifteen hundred revolutions a minute, and swung westward behind the C. O. A few seconds later the four ships were in full career, flying low and fast on the trail.

Southward a few miles the Rio Grande was a twisting silver ribbon, and northward the gray-green mesquite was like a vast, peaceful lake. The air was cool and smooth, and the half darkness hid everything which might be ugly, or spoil the breath-taking beauty below.

Sleepy glanced back at Seeley. The puncher was leaning over the side, holding his goggles to keep them from slipping in the terrific air stream. He was utterly enthralled, apparently, and not a trace of fear or uneasiness did he show as the motor assaulted his ears and the landing and flying wires vibrated to the two mile a minute speed they were making.

Thirty miles on, Ferry dropped off at the large cleared field which was his designated station. The moonlight was sufficient to make landing not too hard, but Sleepy felt better when the Donovan Field man made it in safety. Ferry wasn't such-a-much as a flyer.

He felt sorry for the glacial Boston man, at that. Not so glacial, either, where Beatrice was concerned. Ferry'd had a tough night with that tameless Texan in the back seat. Had to sort of admire the Boston bird, though, at that; he had nerve and the courage of his convictions. There was something sort of pitiful about him, sitting down there and waiting, probably brooding about the blows to his pride which had come that night, mostly through Seeley.

Seeley was no small part of a puzzle, either. Not using his right name, and telling everybody about it just to be impressive, possibly. A bit of a show-off, perhaps—and yet there was real steel in the man. And when he got mad he wasn't showing off. He just couldn't resist the temptation of making a sensation, at times. And he was as chuck full of personality and magnetism as an egg was of meat. Wandering in from nowhere——

Here was the next station, Sleepy came to himself with a snap. He was to drop off here, Pete Miller thirty miles farther on, and Captain Kennard well on toward Laredo. That business of smashing the radio showed nerve, knowledge; and that absolutely no bets were to be overlooked by the unknown criminals. They intended to put something over on the McMullen flight, and to insure its success. They were willing to have the flight know, the morning after, that something had been done without their knowledge, for the privilege of having one free night wherein to do it.

Sleepy's field was plowed, with cut corn stalks still growing therein. It was nearly surrounded by mesquite, and a mile north of the river. There was no wind, so Sleepy, with the careless skill which was always his in the air, dived in a steep spiral, ending up by a terrific sideslip which jammed the ship downward the last two hundred feet only a few yards back of the field. At twenty-five feet he straightened, and dropped the ship over the rim of chaparral with its motor idling softly.

"Well, how'd you like it?" he asked Seeley after he had run the motor out.

The cowman drew a deep breath. "I ain't never gonna be satisfied," he said slowly, "until I can fly."

"No talking, now," warned Sleepy as he got a couple of signal rockets out. "Sit and listen and watch."

Seeley nodded. They sat down, backs against two trees, and smoked. The

night was silent as death, save for the whisper of a breeze in the mesquite and the rustle of night things in the depths of the woods. Watching closely, part of the time through his night glasses, Sleepy wondered just what the tale would be if it could be told, the complete story of what was going on from one end of the border to the other on this glorious night.

He hoped with all his soul that part of it would be going on in his sector.

TWO hours, three. It was after midnight, and still they were sitting there. Then Sleepy straightened and listened. He put his finger to his lips to caution Seeley, and concentrated his mind on the question of whether it was his imagination or not.

It wasn't. A low rumble, far away but plainly audible; maybe a Laredo or McMullen ship hurtling through the night for some special reason.

"Look! There they are!"

It was a wild cry of pure exultation from Seeley's lips, and it rang through the night with a note in it that made Sleepy's heart leap.

"East there—see? Ain't that them exhaust flames?"

No question about it. High in the sky mere pin pricks of light appeared and disappeared like a rapidly revolving lighthouse searchlight. And the roar was a little louder. But that ship was at least ten thousand feet high, and if he hadn't been expecting it, and keeping trained ears constantly receptive, he'd never have heard it.

"There's two of 'em," he exclaimed suddenly as he peered through the glasses. "Can't see anything but the exhausts—no, by gorry, *three*. Other two a lot higher than the lower one, and not so big."

"You was right as a tick," Seeley told him admiringly. "Let's git goin', huh?" he added eagerly.

Sleepy nodded. "As soon as we set off a rocket," he answered.

His calculations, as Brad had pointed out, had been correct. He'd figured that the crippling of the ships and the radio had indicated plainly that the unknown criminals had a strong expectation of being spotted and pursued. Men working on the ground, in the dead of night, would not expect to be caught, or they wouldn't even make the attempt. Granting that the proposed coup was not to take place in McMullen itself—such as a bank robbery or something of the sort—it would inevitably be along the river, and in McMullen territory. Sheriff Trowbridge was covering McMullen with an augmented force of men, but Sleepy had been sure that the river would be the scene of whatever was planned.

And consequently, an outlaw airplane had seemed to be the answer. No matter how high it might fly or how dark the night, no plane could be entirely certain of escaping detection. Particularly now that the border was more closely guarded, due to the flood of narcotics which was visible in San Antonio and points north. Any plane crossing the border would be committing a crime *per se*. And ships had been used before in smuggling operations, both for aliens and for drugs. It was the best known way to do the thing, if the criminals could get a plane and pilot.

"This is bigger than we thought," Sleepy drawled, his eyes glowing and his heart content. "See those two higher spots of light? See 'em kind of circle? That means they're little scouts, probably—anyway, a lot faster than the lower ship. Probably protection ships for some bigger, heavier plane. It all means that those bozos coming up from Mexico have invested fifty thousand, or probably more, on this deal, and that means that the lower ship may be carrying two million dollars worth of dope."

A second before he set off his rocket a line of light arched against the sky, from the east.

"Ferry's right on the job," grinned the excited Seeley.

As their rocket flamed upward to pass the news to Pete Miller, on west, Seeley was strapping his helmet. "Now we'll go get 'em, eh?" he asked joyously.

"The hell we will," Sleepy told him, as he spun the prop. "Not with three ships to fight. No need to. Bird, in Ferry's ship, will radio Donovan and Donovan ships'll be all ready to go. We'll follow these fellows, far enough back to hope we escape detection, and keep radioing where we are. Bird will, that is, or any other observer on the ground. They must have some isolated landing field which we'll spot; then Don-

ovan men'll fly over in force and we get 'em quick and easy."

Seeley's face fell. Then, "Well, it'll be a good ride," he said hopefully, and Sleepy snorted.

"If you call flying over that mesquite at night a good ride, with those ships probably two fighters and ready to jump our bombing plane if they spot us, you're welcome," he stated. But he did not seem downcast.

A moment later he was warming the motor, and three minutes after that, with the thermometer reading seventy Centigrade and the motor shutters closed, the D. H. was roaring over the ground on the takeoff. Once in the air, Sleepy wasted no time. The ships were almost directly above him, now. He hoped they wouldn't spot him yet, although they'd probably be watching closely.

He pointed northward, and with the D. H. angled upward in a steep climb and the motor wide open, he started to get his altitude.

Seeley, in the back, was supposed to keep an eye out for Ferry. Sleepy cursed the fact that the course of the hostile ships had taken them between Ferry and himself, instead of between himself and Miller. Ferry was an amateur as a border patrolman, and no great shakes of a flyer at best. However, everything ought to be all right.

And yet, if the truth were to be told, had he been absolutely certain that everything would be all right, he wouldn't have enjoyed the trip.

He was five thousand feet high, and had lost considerable ground to the higher, level flying ships, when he felt Seeley grip his arm. The puncher, standing in his cockpit and leaning against the propeller blast, pointed eastward. In a moment Sleepy picked up what had to be Ferry's exhaust flames.

For ten minutes more they flew on, Ferry ten miles eastward, and the three ships from Mexico between Sleepy and the other border ship. Apparently they were unseen, as yet; and that meant that by lying back they would remain unnoticed.

Ten thousand feet now, and ten miles back of the lowest ship. The two other craft were at least a half mile higher, and they had to circle widely in order to keep from getting ahead of their sister ship. The D. H.'s were plainly faster if not more powerful than the big plane ahead, and Sleepy, now on a level with it, was easily able to keep up and climb still higher. He wanted to be much higher than those scouts, to have at least a Chinaman's chance should they happen to spot him—and were fighters. Perhaps all three carried dope, but it seemed more reasonable that a gang operating on the scale of this one would have protection against some isolated border ship.

Sleepy was as high as the scouts, now, and the night air was extremely chilly at 14,000 feet. "Lucky they don't look around; guess they figure they're safe," Sleepy soliloquized as he gazed down at the ground. It was so far below that the mesquite was simply a dark stain, and the earth a painted map.

He looked eastward, and picked up Ferry's DeHaviland. It looked to be twenty-five hundred feet lower than Sleepy himself, and closer to the cargo carrying plane. "What's biting him?" Sleepy asked himself with considerable asperity. "Why don't the damn' fool get higher, and keep away from that ship? He's just begging 'em to look at him; and I suppose he thinks one of these frail, awkward old arks stand a chance with a scout! I'd fight half the DeHavilands in the world with one scout, and altitude."

For a second his brain was numb. Down below there Ferry was streaking ahead like a flash. He was diving—and at the lower ship. Going to knock it off. Was it possible he didn't *know* about the other two? He must. He was committing suicide!

And the next second Seeley's grip fairly cut into his flesh. The Texan's eyes were pure fire, his lips contorted into a ferocious grin beneath his goggles. "Look," his lips seemed to be saying, and Sleepy cut the gun to listen. "They're after him. Let's go!"

That "let's go" seemed to ring in the pilot's ears as he saw those two Mexican ships go into terrific dives. They were trying to cut off Ferry before he got the big craft.

Instinctively the stunned Spears knew that Ferry was a gone gosling, without help. Chances were that both the army ships were done for. And Sleepy knew what his duty was. It was to try to hide, and keep on the trail of the strang-

ers despite all handicaps. If Ferry was shot down—hard luck. But the main objective was the trailing of those planes.

The DeHaviland swept around in a bank, and then into a dive. Behind the stick, as the frail bomber's speed meter rose to a hundred and fifty, then a hundred and eighty miles an hour, there crouched a stocky pilot whose wide mouth was thin and tight, and in whose slumbrous eyes there now flashed blinding fire. Duty or no duty, he must help the crazy fool below. Sleepy was on the warpath.

THE wires shrilled madly with the speed, and the D. H. was quivering like jelly from nose to tail-skid. Two hundred miles an hour, now, and the overworked Liberty's roar seemed to take on a note of hysteria. Through all that mad bedlam Sleepy's brain was working quietly, without a miss.

Just like Ferry's cold nerve; and yet it was so damn' foolish! And just like the reckless Texan in the back to want a hand in it, despite the odds, and to save the man he hated. That thought struck Sleepy with such force that for the moment he almost forgot that his ship was shaking itself to pieces, the motor roaring at its absolute limit, and that he was hurtling to almost certain destruction. Just for a second, and then he came to himself. He held his goggles as he leaned over the side, and the air tore the breath from his nostrils.

The three cornered race soon would be over now. Ferry must have seen those two messengers of death dropping on him, but he held to his course, pointed for his quarry. That was nerve, when any second the bullets would start for him. Would he get within shooting distance of his prospective victim before the scouts got within range of him? And could Sleepy himself trust the D. H. to hold together long enough to get down there; and would he be in time to help before Ferry was shot down?

All four ships, now, were in an almost straight line, covering close to a mile, and angling diagonally at the earth. In the lead, diving to escape, and to give the scouts time to overhaul Ferry, was the biggest hostile plane. Behind it a thousand feet or so was Ferry, on its tail. Behind him were the two scouts, and bringing up the rear was a DeHaviland which was outdiving those sturdy single seaters, built for that purpose, while its motionless, nerveless pilot prayed that it would hold together.

He was gaining, but at what cost he knew not. The speed needle was up against the pin, now, and every wire and strut vibrating and jumping as the wires screamed a song of the damned and the ship seemed about to fly to pieces. Only five hundred feet back of the scouts, now; all four ships had dived nearly eight thousand feet.

Ferry hadn't shot yet; he was losing his race. The lower ship was outdiving him. And the scouts were terribly close, it seemed. The moonlight was glinting on their wires, now.

Flame spat from the nose of one of them. They were close enough to shoot, and right on the helpless Ferry's tail. Still he clung grimly to his course. Just one idea in that ice cold, unshakable mind—to get the big ship.

And Spears, usually a lazy lounger, now a hundred and sixty pounds of nerve and muscle afire, gambled gloriously. He dared to push the nose still farther down, and speed which seemed the uttermost limit of human and mechanical resistance crept higher. Glinting eye sighting along the cowling of his ship, finger on the stick trigger of his guns, for the moment unaware of anything else in the world, life, least of all, he waited for a second.

He had it. Streaks of light came from his guns. And like a mortally wounded duck, one scout fell off in a spin, its unknown pilot limp in his seat.

The other one was coming in from the other side. As Sleepy, expecting every second that his crazy plane would burst into a thousand pieces, swung to one side, still holding his dive to get the man, the scout banked swiftly. He'd seen the deadly danger on his tail.

Should he chance it? Sleepy's brain, suddenly preternaturally cool and keen, knew that he must. If he didn't get that man now, he'd have no chance. Be shot down—that was sure death in the mesquite. Might as well chance a broken ship.

So he threw his hurtling D. H. around, still in that whistling, scream-

ing dive, and for just a second got his bead as the scout below started to zoom upward at the bigger ship which was pouncing upon it. He wanted to get in a shot from below, and he did.

Sleepy's was slightly better. There were bullet holes in the wing next day; but from the DeHaviland a hail of bullets raked the scout.

A great ball of fire glowed on the ground when the first single seater hit, as though the earth had opened and given a glimpse of hell. The second scout, pilotless, went into its last long dive.

Now came one of those moments which live forever in a flyer's mind, and come back to haunt him in his nightmares. Sleepy cut the gun, in an endeavor to lessen the speed of the dive, and got both hands on the stick. Could he bring it out without snapping off an elevator, or breaking a control wire as the terrific air pressure impinged on the frail wood and linen tail surface?

It took all his strength to get the stick back an inch or so, and it felt as though it was literally bending beneath the strain. Just the least bit of movement, and he held it there, feet braced against the rudder.

Every second he expected something to break. With maddening slowness the nose started up. They were so close to the ground, now, that the chaparral seemed rushing up to meet them.

The controls held, by a miracle! Gradually the tortured shriek of the wires lowered its tone, and the frenzied drum of the motor grew less. Five hundred feet above the limitless gray-green mesquite which rolled on all sides of him, Sleepy got his ship level, and his powerful body relaxed. He permitted himself a grin, and then his face sobered as he leaned over the side to see a second red explosion which died away into a flickering fire to match the other funeral pyre.

He looked upward, searching the sky for the cargo plane, and for Ferry. Had he been shot down?

He had not. A thousand feet above Sleepy's D. H., Ferry was following the big ship—no he wasn't, he was coming at it, it seemed from the side. The big ship wasn't diving any more; it was too low already, and evidently the first dive had been merely to give the scouts an opportunity to catch up with the D. H. As Sleepy watched he saw flame spit from the side of the big ship. They had guns in the fuselage, then. Why didn't Ferry get underneath and zoom at them from a blind angle? He was diving right into the guns.

Then the reason was plain to see. His propeller was whirling very slowly. His motor was crippled, somehow, and his only chance to get the ship was in a motorless glide.

And there he held it, straight into that hail of bullets. He wasn't shooting himself, and, of course, the big Liberty gave him some protection. It seemed that he was literally on top of the enemy plane when his guns spoke. Just for a second or two; then he banked away, over them, and started diving in the opposite direction.

And the big ship started down, wobbling crazily. Ferry's shots had taken effect somewhere—and Ferry was a man. Without a motor, probably almost out of ammunition, he'd still held to his objective, and attained it!

Sleepy glanced around at Seeley. That tall Texan was standing in the rear, and his hawklike profile stood out from the close fitting helmet like that of some smiling demon of the night. As though by instinct, the rider had his gun in his hand while he smiled upward at the ships.

SLEEPY circled slowly, watching the two come down. There was still deadly danger ahead for both. There was nowhere to land but on the scrubby mesquite—and Ferry would have to land at seventy miles an hour.

There was one spot where a wreck would be least likely to be fatal. A freak of the mesquite had left a long, crooked, narrow cleared space, where the sand gleamed whitely. It wasn't wide enough for the seventy feet of wingspread, but it was better than just trees.

And that was where Ferry, by good fortune, landed. He did a perfect job. He got his ship into a spot where there was room for it, and it crashed into the trees after rolling twenty feet. Both wings were swept away, and the D. H. was a total wreck, save for undercarriage and motor.

Out from the débris two figures

crawled. Ferry and Bird waved reassuringly to the low sweeping Spears just as the alien ship crashed into the chaparral, only a half mile away.

Nobody came out from that wreckage. Sleepy waited and watched as Ferry and Bird made their way to it. He saw them approach warily, guns in hand, while he scraped the trees with his undercarriage to watch. Finally they cleared a way into a heap of wood, linen and twisted metal, and emerged carrying two motionless figures. They took the trouble to bind their captives' hands, however, so they were alive, if unconscious.

Mr. Peter Miller arrived on the scene at this juncture, having been drawn by the fires while searching for the quarry the rockets had indicated. Procedure in this emergency was automatic for the patrol; one ship always on duty, circling, to guide a ground party to the spot. It was speedily decided, by signals, that Pete should stay for a tour while Sleepy made off to McMullen. There he'd round up the other flyers, if necessary, get food and water to be dropped to the stranded men and get the sheriff and a posse started for the scene.

It may be remarked that Trowbridge and his minions arrived the next evening, and found the two airmen in charge of prisoners, badly hurt, who refused to say a word. There was nearly two million dollars worth of dope in the big wrecked ship. Inasmuch as the prisoners' silence was never broken, old Manuel's part in the plot could never be entirely confirmed, or the reason for which he was murdered. Except that two unknown men in khaki were seen in the Mexican section of McMullen that night.

Sleepy let the D. H. run wide open to cover the fifty miles back to McMullen, and lounged contentedly in his cockpit. Too bad those boys had to be killed, but they'd asked for it. There were the lights of McMullen, miles ahead, and the airdrome, a tiny white square as the searchlight beamed steadily.

He turned as Brad Seeley touched him, and found that bronzed young cowpuncher leaning over with his mouth close to the pilot's ear. Sleepy cut the gun to listen.

"Know that big field right on the river, due south o' the field?"

Sleepy nodded.

"Easy landin', ain't it?" bellowed Seeley. "Will yuh drop me there? I left my pony there—and caught a ride in a car this evenin' tuh gain time."

Again Sleepy nodded. It would take only five minutes or so. He wondered how Seeley had liked the trip. He'd certainly had a good introduction to flying. However, ignorance had undoubtedly been bliss in that soirée back there; such things as the perils of a dive in a DeHaviland would not be realized fully by an amateur.

Ten minutes later he'd dropped into the field easily, by the light of the moon, and Seeley got out. "Stretch yore laigs a minute, old-timer, while I see that the horse is O. K. I might have to go back with yuh."

Sleepy lit a cigarette, leaving the motor idling softly, as Seeley dived into the mesquite rimming the field. The Rio Grande whispered along a few feet away, and to southward Mexico stretched in dark silence.

A moment later Seeley came back, riding a black horse, as fine a specimen of horseflesh as its rider was of physical manhood. Seeley rode directly alongside the pilot, and handed him the helmet and goggles he'd used. "Thanks," he grinned, and never had his eyes seemed more bright or that bounding vitality of his more obvious. "It was shore a nice evenin'. In case I don't see yuh fur a little while, at the field, I want yuh tuh carry 'em a little confession."

"Sure," said the surprised Sleepy, gazing up at the cowboy. "What?"

The rider grinned widely. "I been determined tuh git a ride fur a long time," he drawled, "and figured this was my last chance. I knew you fellahs was lookin' for a lot o' smugglers and all that. So when I got that tip I made it my business to snoop some, jest so I could horn in on a ride."

Sleepy chuckled. "When it comes to nerve," he admitted, "you're there."

"Thanks."

The rider made a move so quick that Sleepy to this day cannot tell how it happened that he was gazing into the muzzle of a six-gun. Above it was that whimsically one sided face, still smiling. "Don't move, old-timer. Gimme that gun. I'll git it. I need an extra one, where I'm goin'. Now listen."

He stopped again, as though relishing the situation to the uttermost. Sleepy, every muscle tense, stood as motionless as did Seeley's superb horse. The flyer was totally unable to fathom the sudden change.

"Sleepy, don't be scairt. I ain't gonna shoot yuh. Listen. I reckon I never had more fun in my life than I have kiddin' you guys and gittin' my ride. Tell 'em tuh keep my hat fur a souvenir. Tell Bee I'm plumb sorry I couldn't come back fur that dance. Tell Ferry he's a man if I ever seen one, and I'm sorry we had any argument. Tell Bee she could do worse'n take him, which she will. I can always tell when a gal's in love.

"One thing more, an' I'll slope."

He reined back his horse, and turned it toward the river. Silhouetted against the sky, his bronzed face was cut by white teeth as his head came back in the old gesture. "Sleepy, two nights back a dentist friend took out my gold tooth in the middle o' night and put in a white one fur me. I dyed my hair. I painted my hoss. And I got tuh the border. I shore wanted that ride, though. And I got it. Thanks.

"And give all the boys the best regards o' Goldy More. *Adios!*"

The horse leaped forward, and into the river. As it splashed through the narrow, shallow Rio Grande a half stunned pilot stood on the shore and watched until horse and rider disappeared into the chaparral.

Then Sleepy raised his hand in a gesture of farewell while a slow smile widened his lips. "Oh, well," he whispered, "I couldn't have stopped him." And a moment later was roaring through the night on his unfinished mission.

CAMELS IN OUR SOUTHWEST

IN THE 1850's, Jefferson Davis, then Secretary of War, at the urging of Lieutenant Beale, asked Congress for an appropriation for the purchase of camels for use in the Southwest. In the following Spring $30,000 was appropriated, and thirty-three of the animals were bought in Africa and landed at Indianola, Texas, in 1856. The following year forty-odd more camels were landed at the same port. Great expectations were aroused by the performance of these animals. Loaded with 1200 pounds and over, they calmly arose to their feet and walked off with this burden. They could out-travel mules two miles to one. Lieutenant Beale used them on his forty-eight day exploration for a wagon road to the Pacific Ocean, subjected them to trials which mules could not endure, and became very enthusiastic about them. He claimed that they easily walked up grades with their packs which the mules found hard to climb unloaded; that they could go without water a great deal longer, that they were better in sand and on sharp volcanic rock, and that they swam rivers without hesitation and tackled tasks cheerfully.

On the other side of the ledger was the fact that their odor and appearance caused stampedes, that they had to be handled by men who knew them, and that they would wander for miles during the night. Little exploring trips of thirty miles and more were very appealing to the camels, but did not appeal to the men who had to hunt them, or to the plans of an expedition which preferred to go about its business rather than to spend its time rounding up its animals.

They were not a success and some authorities give the following reasons for it. Soldiers and packers hated them like poison, as did the other animals; and notwithstanding Beale's O. K. on their performance on sharp lava, it was said that their feet were too tender for the rocky trails in the Southwest; and one man says that some of them actually died from thirst! Eventually the survivors, forty-odd, were turned loose in Arizona to live or die; and, incidentally, to make sundry innocent and unsuspecting prospectors swear off drinking and give heed to their sinfulness. Some years later about a score of them were rounded up by civilians and taken to Nevada. Here, also, they were a failure. Taken into Sonora, they failed again. For years stories drifted into the settlements about camels wandering into the field of vision of some prospector, causing him to doubt his eyes and sanity, and his auditors to doubt his veracity.—CLARENCE E. MULFORD.

Twisted Bars

By Erle Stanley Gardner

Pug Parry was such a gorilla that he could twist iron bars into loops. Phil Denton was such a little jigger that they called him "Big Hat." With the other hands of the Circle C outfit Phil acted right respectful before Pug's terrifying strength—respectful, that is, until Pug trespassed on private range.

BILL CARSON, better known as Old Walrus, because of the gray mustache which drooped mournfully down either side of his chin, cast his mild, blue eyes over the sun swept street, then spat reflectively. "They's somethin' goin' on, as sure as shootin'. Them Bar Y boys have got some devilment up their sleeves, an' they're just walkin' 'round waitin' for it to shake out."

Sam Eaton, tall, broad shouldered, upstanding, but with an expression of utter pessimism on his face, replied in a voice which sounded like the knelling of a bell. "They're hangin' somethin' on us, sure. Here comes Big Hat; let's see what he says."

What Big Hat's version of the situation might have been remained undiscovered, for at that instant a man from the rival Bar Y outfit walked behind Sam Eaton, and reaching out, clapped that individual a resounding whack between the shoulders. "Get off'n that sidewalk if yuh ain't travelin'," he remarked, stopping as though to argue the point. "Yuh cain't stop traffic on the city streets that way."

For once the expression of mournful sorrow left Sam Eaton's face. It was crowded out by a look of surprise which was even mirrored in the faded blue eyes of Old Walrus.

Sam Eaton was supposed to be the champion fighter of the Mayama Valley, and the man who had so aggressively called him was a newcomer to the Bar Y ranch, a rather small, wiry individual who weighed several pounds less than the strapping Circle C pessimist.

It was Old Walrus who spoke first, age, gray hairs and much experience giving him the right to advise. "Start runnin', cowboy. Yuh done stepped on a hornet's nest."

The Bar Y man stood his ground, his little sneering eyes fastened upon Sam Eaton. From nowhere in particular Bar Y boys began to assemble, from doorways, alleys, around corners. There was something tense and jubilant in their attitude, a thrill of anticipation permeated the atmosphere.

Sam's great fist crashed forward in a lurching, smashing blow, a blow that dashed straight for the other's jaw.

The smaller man did not put up his hands, made no effort to ward off that terrific drive, but somehow, just as the great fist was within a fraction of an inch of his jaw, his neck moved swiftly, smoothly, easily, not much, just the width of Sam Eaton's knuckles. The blow whizzed harmlessly by, Sam being carried forward by his own vicious lunge.

The newcomer did not seem to move. There was a slight flick of something white below his right shoulder to be sure, but it could not have been a blow, his body did not pivot, there was no drawing back of arm and shoulder, no fierce clenching of fist; and yet, as Sam straightened, his head seemed to jerk, his face flushed, and his hand dropped involuntarily to the pit of his stomach,

as his mouth flopped open, gasping for air. As he stepped back, staggering slightly, Sam's eyes carried a look of bewilderment.

There came a flash of motion, an easy rhythmic stab of speed, and one of Sam's eyes suddenly began to swell, puffing up like a young mushroom. That time the stranger had moved, all of the spectators could see that; but it was a motion unusual to the cow camp. The left arm had straightened like a lightning bolt, darted through space, flashed back to his side. The man seemed to have made no exertion, no effort. It was merely as though a string had been tied to his left fist and had suddenly jerked the arm out straight, then snapped it back to the man's side. There appeared to be no force to the blow; and yet there was the swelling eye.

With a bellow of rage Sam charged, a charge that was merely a blind rush, fists hurtling, jaw thrust forward. This time there were two swift flashes of arm, and Sam sprawled backward in the thick dust of the main street. The Bar Y man turned with a slight swagger and walked on down the street. The few Circle C boys who were watching gathered about Old Walrus and the defeated puncher.

"Hell! It's one o' these newfangled boxin' perfessors. He's stayin' up at the Bar Y for the winter an' he's just showin' off what he can do."

All eyes turned to Phil Dunton, otherwise known as "Big Hat". Phil was one of these small wiry men who are extremely sensitive about their size. He always wore extremely high heeled shoes and a very high hat in order to make him seem taller. In that country the height of a hat was always directly proportionate to the size of the brim, so that Phil's headgear seemed nearly big enough for him to crawl inside and use as a tent if necessary.

"How'd yuh get the dope, Big Hat?"

"I heard two of 'em talkin' an' I was comin' over here tryin' to tell Sam not to start nothin' but I seen I was too late. What's more, that's not the worst. This maverick has had shipped in a coupla sets o' these newfangled boxin' gloves, an' he's goin' to teach all the punchers over there how to handle their mitts so they can lick any Circle C man in the country."

"Well, I guess it'll take more than a pair o' padded boxin' gloves to stop old Colonel Colt's little equalizer!" burst forth Sam Eaton, dusting the fine, powdery dust from his clothes. "Maybe them boys can get pretty fresh learnin' all these fancy passes with their fists, but my friend Colt has taught me somethin' that no boxin' perfesser in the country can raise."

A murmur of assent ran through the augmenting circle where the Circle C boys condoled their fallen champion.

"Wait a minute, lads." It was Old Walrus who spoke. "That ain't a-goin' to do, an' yuh know it. Them times have passed in this here country, an' we'd all be gettin' ourselves into a heap o' trouble. Them boys can shoot, too, if they need to, an' we can't go killin' off a lot o' good cowpunchers over nothin'. Nope, we've been circumvented, an' it's up to us if we're goin' to stay that way. That four-flushin' gang just happened to have this here boxin' perfesser winterin' there on the ranch, an' they took advantage of it. That don't mean nothin' except that it's our move."

"An' what move did ye have in mind?" asked one of the angry men.

All eyes turned to the Walrus. The younger men at times resented the conservatism of his counsel, but one and all respected the bowlegged old puncher for the strategist that he was. If there was a trick that could win the game, Old Walrus with his mild faded blue eye and his long drooping mustache could be counted on to be forthcoming with that trick.

"Wa'al, boys, speakin' offhand an' hastylike, I've got an idea this here perfesser is nothin' but a shorthorn pilgrim that's wandered in here from the outside to take advantage o' the winter climate o' this section in regards to his health. He's strong enough with his arms, but he's probably had one o' these here nervous breakdowns, or got a touch o' rheumatiz, or somethin' like that. He ain't no puncher, even if he is dressed like one an' is runnin' around on hossback with them Bar Y boys. There'd oughta be some way o' keepin' him from enjoyin' his stay long enough to teach that bunch o' hasbeens over there very much about this yere manly art o' self defense."

The ring was silent for a moment.

"To thunder with this here highbrow stuff!" came a voice from one of the

sunburnt fire eaters. "I'm goin' over to my war bag an' strap me on a coupla six-shooters, an' then they can take all the boxin' gloves in the world an' dump 'em on the Bar Y ranch. What's more, when I get these yere shooters danglin' on my hip, I'm goin' to hunt up one rabbit eared boxin' perfesser!"

A muttered chorus of approval was drowned in the thud of hoofs as a horseman came pounding down the dusty street and reined up before the impromptu council of war. As the men of the Circle C turned they confronted the sheriff of the county sitting easily astride a huge black, his star fastened to the outside of his vest, a sure sign that he was on official business.

"Howdy, boys. I just happened to hear that there was some talk of an uprisin'. Now here's the dope. I ain't narrow minded an' I'm willin' to overlook a lot, but I ain't aimin' to have no feud start in this here county. From now on the first puncher, whether he's Circle C or Bar Y, that gets to wearin' guns off the ranch an' when he's in town goes into the hoosegow. Yuh can fight fair any way ye want to, but guns is barred."

The Walrus spat on the dusty sidewalk, and surveyed the sheriff coldly. "How come ye got tipped off to be over here with this here warnin'?"

The sheriff grinned easily. "Now don't get on no high horse, Walrus. To tell ye the truth I heard that the Circle C boys was goin' to try an organized campaign o' pickin on the Bar Y outfit, an' it was a Bar Y man that told me, too. I done said I'd ride over an' spread a warnin', but I told them Bar Y boys that I'd seen a lot more o' life than a lot o' them, and if they got to crowdin' on the toes of a bowlegged longhorn known as Old Walrus they'd wish they'd never done it. I'm here to hold down the gunplay, but anything else yuh can think up goes—an' I don't aim to restrict yore style none, Walrus!"

The old man beamed at the compliment. "Wa'al, wa'al, an' did ye tell 'em that, now! Wa'al under those circumstances, sheriff, we appreciate yore official position and thankee for yuh sentiments. Boys, I guess we'll be ridin' out to the ranch. There ain't nothin' in town for us this afternoon, anyhow."

This suggestion was greeted with storm. "What! Let them Bar Y boys bluff us into backin' out when we've got a legal holiday with nothin' to do? Why shucks! What's come over yuh, Walrus! We ain't goin' to let no boxin' perfesser bluff us out!"

Big Hat Phil Dunton was particularly emphatic. "I got a date, an' I ain't goin' no place for nobody."

The old Walrus sighed. "That's the way with yuh young fire eaters. I was just tryin' to git ye away where we wouldn't have nothin' rubbed in. It looks to me like that Bar Y gang was loaded for trouble. Stay if ye want to, but the less we give 'em to crow over the less we'll have to wipe out. Stay if ye want to, but we'd better be all stickin' around together. That bunch ain't much more than started."

The old man's prediction proved to be correct. Before the afternoon had merged into evening, and before the evening had slipped away to the time of closing the Palace Theatre, the official closing time of all Coyote City, four of the Circle C boys were wearing black eyes, eyes that were puffed and shiny. The Bar Y outfit seemed to have already had considerable advance instruction, and the punchers had laid aside the wild haymakers of the cow camp, and instead fought with swift, deadly short-arm jabs, jabs that came with speed and precision. In short the Bar Y outfit had become formidable fighters, fighters who had very apparently been training, eagerly looking forward to this occasion and wearing chips on their shoulders.

The town of Coyote City was the county seat of Mayama County and lay in the center of the sun swept valley known as Mayama Valley. In prehistoric times there had been a river in the valley. Now there was a depression in the glaring sand. The only water was that reached from deep wells. Sun, sand and cacti surrounded the little city which was supported entirely by the patronage of cowpunchers who came in from the adjoining ranches to spend their pay checks.

The valley cut through two ranges of mountains. Those to the west gave a fertile, rolling pasture land where the Bar Y held nearly all of the grazing privileges. The eastern range was the property of the Circle C ranch. To the north and south there were smaller ranches, but the two main ranches of the entire county were the well estab-

lished rival brands which held the opposing mountain ridges, controlling untold thousands of acres in their grazing lands and fostering a deep seated rivalry.

Because of the formation of the country the Bar Y boys and the Circle C contingent held infrequent meetings. It was only on legal holidays that the town of Coyote City held any great numbers of the two factions. On ordinary nights a few men would ride in to the picture show and on Saturday nights the stores did a brisk business, but there were relatively few occasions on which the men turned out in numbers.

Big Hat Phil was "sweet" on the cashier of the moving picture show, a sweetness which was a matter of weeks and was patent and undisguised. The recipient of his admiration, however, a black haired, snub nosed bundle of feminine foibles enjoyed the prestige of being virtually the only unattached girl of any importance in the little city, and was inclined to take every advantage of her position. Her heart was besieged by a round score of cow men, some half dozen of whom were intensely serious. If she had any preference she carefully disguised it, and her smiles were just personal enough to be upsetting, yet impersonal enough to be noncommittal. It was a fair field and no favors.

AT THE Circle C the men took stock of injuries, compared notes, and consulted the Walrus. It appeared certain that the cowpunchers, men who fought as they lived, with that wild direct vigorous mode of attack, could not stand up against the scientific fighting which the men of the Bar Y were mastering rapidly.

In the past the Circle C had enjoyed all the advantage. Big Sam Eaton had been a tower of strength, and there could be no denying that at times he had used his fistic prowess in other than self defense. In fact it had always amused the Circle C men to think that the Bar Y punchers hunted a hole when Big Sam was on the warpath. The shoe was now very decidedly on the other foot.

The Walrus declined to commit himself. "I gotta go in to Los Angeles an' meet the big squeeze this week, an' I gotta hundred an' one things to worry me about. I ain't goin' to take on no problems in addition until after I've got all this business stuff outa my system, an' even then I ain't makin' no promises."

"S'pose yuh pick us up a boxin' professor of our own an' bring the bird out here with yuh?" suggested Sam Eaton, whose black eyes had turned to a sickly green, and who bitterly resented his downfall from the throne of fistic supremacy.

Walrus shook his head. "I don't want to have yuh all gettin' interested in somethin' that's goin' to take up all yore time. Yuh are sort of a no-'count outfit as it is, an' there's lots o' work to be done. Yuh can earn more money ropin' steers than yuh can shadow boxin' out in the corral, an' one of them things is bound to interfere with the other. What's more it ain't no use to fight the other fellow with his own weapons. This is a time when we gotta use strategy; an' I ain't goin' to think of it until after I've done got all this here business stuff off my chest."

The edict was final, and those who knew the Walrus best recognized the firm mouth that was concealed behind the drooping mustache. The Walrus could be depended on to think up some scheme which would enable the Circle C to regain its self respect and also its supremacy, but he would think it up in his own way.

In the meantime some of the others took the situation into their own hands, trying to find out some method whereby the boxing instructor of the Bar Y could be persuaded to leave the country. They acquired some additional information and a little experience, but no direct results—unless the black eye which was hung on the luckless individual who approached the professor directly with a bribe to transfer his instruction to the Circle C could be considered a result.

The boxer was none other than Herbert Malone, a former candidate for championship honors. A spot on his lung which had developed after he had retired from the ring had caused him to winter in the south, taking advantage of a cattle ranch where he could be in the open air. He was not in a condition to indulge in any great amount of desperate fighting, but the few blows which were necessary when he was confronted by one of the unskilled punchers of the Circle C were hardly enough to make him draw a long breath, and he was

making rapid strides in teaching the men of the Bar Y just how to handle their fists.

Those who knew and would talk stated that the bunkhouse of the Bar Y resembled a huge gymnasium. Bags of sand hung from the rafters and the men, under the personal supervision of Herbert Malone, practised hitting those short arm jabs which are so deadly in the ring, but which the average untrained individual knows nothing of.

If the Walrus could be said to be the slave of any particular form of dissipation, it was an overpowering desire to watch motion pictures in the making. Inasmuch as Fielding Spencer, director of the Sun Maid Comedies, was a close friend of the old man's and one who made a hunting trip every year to the Circle C ranch, old Walrus had no difficulty in indulging himself in his pet hobby whenever he was in the city of the Angels.

About the studios of the Sun Maid Comedies hung all sorts of types, beautiful girls and near beautiful girls, fond mothers with infants, also fond mothers who left their infants at home and posed as flappers. In short, there was always a crowd of extras numbering all sorts and conditions, all types and styles, all ages and sexes, assembled about the doors of the studio.

It was while Fielding Spencer was discoursing on his latest stunt in artistic lighting, leading the old cowpuncher around the lot, that he felt a tug at his sleeve. Turning and ceasing his discourse on lights and back lights, floods, broads, banks and spots, he beheld the old man staring into the crowd of extras who thronged the gateway in the high board fence.

"Who is he?" asked the Walrus, his mustache almost seeming to bristle as his eyes kindled with interest.

The director followed his gaze, then laughed. "That's 'Pug' Parry, the toughest looking bird in seventeen states, bar none. He always takes the part of the heavyweight pug in the fight scenes, and does the strong man stunts. He's strong as an ox and can bend iron bars over his arm like you'd bend curtain rods."

The Walrus nodded. "That's my man. Send him over. I got a job for him on the ranch."

The director looked at his friend with widened eyes. "Walrus, a fellow never knows just what's going on in that mind of yours, nor what's in the wind. I don't know whether you want this fellow or not. He's strong as an ox, but ——"

Walrus interrupted. "I don't want the 'but' part of it. I gotta hunch, an' when I gets a hunch I plays it. There's always these but's that take the joy outa life an' sap your confidence in what yuh want to do. I tell yuh this bird is made for the part an' I want to talk with him, an' if he's got any weak points I don't want to know 'em. Call him over."

Pug Parry proved to be a man of striking appearance. His face bore the marks of a considerable amount of external violence. His nose had been broken at least once, and apparently no one had taken the trouble to reset it. His jaw stuck forward like the prow of a battleship tearing into a head sea. His ears resembled two cauliflowers which had gone well to seed. His eyes were two small, beady glitters of light beneath heavy eyebrows, well covered by a projecting porch of skull. Here and there a missing tooth punctuated the smile which the giant gave as he lumbered over and extended a hamlike hand.

The Walrus, small, bowlegged, gazed over the six-feet-and-a-half of battered hulk with an appreciative blue eye. "Are yuh strong as yuh look?" he asked as soon as the introductions had been performed.

Pug Parry did not answer the question directly. Instead he turned and looked around the cluttered lot. Finally finding what he sought, he lumbered away and soon came back with a heavy iron bar.

Opening his great jaw, he clamped the middle of the bar in his teeth, took a grip on either end, gave a heave, and pulled the ends down, making a perfect arch of the heavy iron! Next he rolled up his sleeves, took the bent iron, swung it in one hand down upon the other arm, and as the bar struck those corded muscles, it whipped around until the ends nearly closed, making it appear to be a heavy iron hoop!

"An' that ain't all," boasted the giant. "I'll get a bunch o' nails an' I'll show yuh——"

Walrus shook his head, his long pendant mustaches swinging and swaying with the emphasis of his gesture. "No

yuh don't. Yuh are just exactly what I'm lookin' for, an' I don't want yuh to go no further. I'm convinced. How'd yuh like a job for the next thirty days at steady pay an' expenses, all transportation to an' from, furnished?"

Pug Parry's face beamed. Jobs at steady pay were none too frequent in the movie game at the time. "The full thirty days, regardless o' how she turns out?"

Walrus nodded.

"Here, wait a minute," came the desperate voice of Fielding Spencer. "It's only right you should know, Walrus, that this here hombre——"

Walrus interrupted. "Don't want to know. Pug you're hired. The full thirty days goes. There's a maverick I want yuh to chase off the range."

The director sighed, the sigh of one who had attempted to do his duty and who was blameless as far as results are concerned.

WHEN Walrus and his strange guest arrived at the Circle C ranch a counsel of war was in progress. The men were desperate, and the most desperate of all was Big Hat Phil. Dotty Manners, the cashier at the Coyote City Palace Theatre, had recently made it plain both by actions and words that she liked manly men, men who could be counted on for protection in time of need. The boxing instructor, Herbert Malone, appealed to her, and she was showing a decided preference for the Bar Y men as a whole.

Big Hat, with his diminutive stature, his small hands and tiny wrists, was distinctly at a disadvantage when it came to a comparison of physical prowess. While he was quick, with that catlike quickness of the small, well knit man, he had not the weight or the brawn to enable him to hold his own in physical combat with the more burly men of the rival ranch, and he lacked the science to make proper use of his speed. The world had been unkind to him of late, and his morose ways and clouded eyes bore evidence that Dotty Manners was more than merely a passing fancy with him.

The men gave one startled glance at the flat footed, barrel chested giant who carried his distorted features slightly behind old Walrus as the latter came chugging into camp in the flivver, and then they crowded around the car, forgetting their conference, eager to see what Walrus had in mind.

One glance at Pug Parry was enough.

"Boys," said the mild mannered old fox, "shake hands with Pug Parry, the strongest man in Arizony!"

Hand after hand was crushed in the viselike grip of the professional strong man. The cowpunchers of the Circle C began to smile, those broad, expansive smiles which bespeak triumph.

Parry turned to Walrus. "Yuh said yuh wouldn't tell me what yuh wanted me to do until we got to the ranch, but that yuh'd tell me then. What's my line?"

Walrus smiled. "You will come into the big an' thrivin' county seat o' Mayama County with me tonight, an' when I give yuh the word you'll start wrappin' iron bars around yore hands an' twistin' nails with yore teeth an' all of that. Then I'll hand yuh a message to a party an' yuh go an' deliver it. That's all."

Parry looked suspicious. "But the job runs on the full thirty days?"

Walrus nodded. "Sure. I want yuh to register as a permanent fixture o' the Circle C. Thirty days'll do it, but I wouldn't trust it to work in any less time than that."

Amidst jubilant whoops of delight the Circle C punchers made haste to break into war bags and to don bright colored shirts and long haired chaps. It gave every evidence of being a big night. A Saturday, it was almost certain that a goodly contingent of the Bar Y punchers would be at the Palace Theatre.

So elaborate were the preparations of the Circle C men that the picture had started at the Palace Theatre before the cowpunchers had dined, adorned themselves in their glad rags, saddled and ridden into the city. Whatever Bar Y men may have been in town were in the theatre and there was nothing to do but go on in and watch the show, trusting to luck for a conflict afterward. The Circle C men were anxious to see their protegé in action, and hoped to waylay some of the punchers of the rival ranch.

Hardly had the delegation from the Circle C ranch reached the ticket window than it became apparent that Pug Parry was gripped by some form of violent emotion. He looked long and intently at Miss Dotty Manners, who presided over the destinies of the cash,

and sighed. Pug's sigh was like all the rest of him, very easy to perceive. Also, there was something flattering about that tremulous sigh. It was the gasp of a man whose heart simply has got up and walked off, completely lost.

Dotty Manners patted her black hair and endeavored to look indifferent, but her startled eyes could not keep from returning to the face which towered above the heads of the cowpunchers, the face which was battered and banged until it led one to believe its possessor must have been used at some time as a human battering ram. Still it was not a hard face, there was something sensitive about the eyes——.

Nor was all of this lost upon Big Hat Phil. He was first warned by that sigh of admiration which sounded like steam escaping from a defective boiler. By standing on his toes he was able to see the self conscious face of his queen as she patted her back hair in that manner she assumed when she felt herself basking in the light of masculine admiration.

Big Hat sighed, himself. It would seem that his troubles were on the increase instead of otherwise. It had been only two days ago that Dotty Manners had remarked that she simply adored manly men. Big Hat had stood to his full height, swelled his narrow chest and elevated the lofty crown of his flapping hat to its highest point, while he had turned to receive her smile of admiration. To his surprise she was not looking at him at all but at some distant point, and there was a meditative something about her tone that made him feel very much a part of the background.

Eventually the punchers filed noisily into the show and shuffled down the board aisle to a place where several vacant seats showed in a row. Hardly were they seated than Pug Parry's voice came booming over the theatre. "This here's one o' my pictures. You'll see me in this. I took the part o' Knockout Smith, the champion. Wait'll yuh see me work!"

Heads turned in surprise, heads of both Circle C and Bar Y men. Across the theatre one Herbert Malone nearly snapped his neck looking across at the Circle C visitors, and thereafter he squirmed uneasily in his seat.

Nor was Pug's prediction unfounded. The picture had progressed only to the second reel when the hero and heroine were disclosed as spectators at a series of prize fights. The main event was pictured as being between Knockout Smith and Cyclone Kelley. The features of Knockout Smith showed clearly upon the screen, typical features such as were the delight of screen directors, in short, the features of Pug Parry himself.

The cowpunchers of the Circle C looked on their visitor with renewed respect, a respect that was akin to awe, for Knockout Smith of the screen moved with such catlike quickness and packed such a terrific wallop that Cyclone Kelley seemed to have no other use for the back of his head than to make dents in the floor of the ring. To men who knew nothing of variable speed photography, or the numerous devices employed by wily directors, the feats performed by Knockout Smith seemed marvelous.

When the screen battle had been concluded, and Cyclone Kelley had hit the floor for the final time, when the camera had registered a closeup of the battered, battle-scarred features of Knockout Smith, the champion, there came a flash while the scene shifted back to the hero and heroine.

At that instant, from the back of the theatre, there sounded the patter of feminine applause, the dainty clapping of enthusiastic palms. Pug Parry leaned back in his seat and smiled. "Pretty nifty, eh?"

Big Hat slumped in his chair. No need to ask who had applauded. He did not turn his head. The clapping could have come only from the cashier's window.

Big Sam Eaton, deposed pugilistic champion of the Mayama Valley did not gloat over the possibilities of the situation now that Pug Parry had joined the Circle C group. His pessimistic mind worked, as ever, upon gloomy channels. He leaned across two intervening punchers in order to whisper to Walrus. "If Parry kills that bird won't we be liable as accomplices or some such things? Me, I don't want to get hung."

The whisper carried across the theatre, and Herbert Malone mopped a perspiring forehead with a red bandanna handkerchief.

Walrus shook his head, while he stroked his long mustaches, "He won't

kill him, jest only maim him for life."

Malone coughed, a dry, nervous cough.

When the picture show had drawn to a close and the hero and heroine had embraced for the exact footage allowed by various unemotional censors, the audience shuffled along the board aisles, out into the open, and over to the Barrel Soft Drink Parlor.

In times past the Barrel Soft Drink Parlor had been called the Barrel Saloon. The word Saloon had been removed by the simple process of adding another coat of paint, but the word defiantly showed through the paint which had been added, indicative of the difficulties of enforcement of prohibitive legislation. Within the cool interior there were soda fountains, bar and rail. To the initiated was known the secret signal by which a white liquid could be transferred from beneath the bar to a small glass, and served with the whispered admonition to drink it quick. It was here that the various cowpunchers held informal club.

When Pug Parry entered the place there was an expectant hush. All eyes were turned upon him. As though by accident an iron bar reposed on the counter. Near it were some heavy spikes. Pug Parry seemed fascinated by the iron bar. Picking it up he put it in his massive jaw and clamped his teeth. His hands sought either end of the bar, there was a heave. Parry took the bent bar and rolled up his sleeve, bending it into a hoop over the muscle of his arm. He picked up one of the big spikes and twisted it between his fingers.

One by one, silently, furtively, men of the Bar Y outfit left the place, slinking out of the door and into the night. The muffled thud of hoofs sounded from the street and the Circle C boys were left in sole possession. Herbert Malone had not been in the room. Apparently he had faded immediately after the picture show.

The Circle C men became hilarious. The Walrus received many enthusiastic thumps upon his back. Much white mule was slipped over the counter.

Big Hat, however, did not share in the general jubilation. He worked around to the Walrus and, when he had a fitting opportunity, suggested that the time had probably come when Pug Parry could be returned. He had performed his duties, made the world safe for Coltocracy.

The Walrus looked his surprise. "Shucks, we just got 'em started. We gotta run that maverick of a boxin' perfesser plumb outa the country. I opine he's now headed for parts unknown, leavin' a shaken bunch o' pupils behind him, but we gotta keep Pug here long enough to make sure. I got him tied up for thirty days, and here he stays."

Disconsolate, Big Hat wandered out into the night.

SUBSEQUENT events proved that Pug Parry had done all that could be expected of him, and more. All, in that he had put the enemy to rout. More, in that he had elected himself king of the Circle C. At first the cowpunchers had paid willing homage, given him the best cuts of meat, the choice desserts, listened to his booming voice as the final decision upon all disputes; but, finally, Parry seemed too much. He grew arrogant and domineering.

Tactfully Walrus approached the subject. "Wa'al, Pug, I guess there ain't no need o' ye stickin' around no longer. This here boxin' perfesser has beat it, an' the rest o' the Bar Y boys seemed to have tamed down quite considerable. I guess yuh can hit the grit back to the movies if yore heart is pinin' that way."

Pug shook his battered head. "I ain't goin' until the month is up. She was a month's job, an' I'm stickin' by my end o' the contract, an' you can stick by yours."

Casually, Pug picked up a large spike which was lying on the bunkhouse table and twisted it between his fingers, much as a nervous person would play with a piece of thin wire.

Walrus nodded. "O' course, o' course. She was a month's job, an' I wasn't figurin' on short changin' yuh any. I'll jest pay yuh off on a month's time an' yuh can have the advantage o' not havin' to work."

"That's all right, too," rejoined Pug, his narrow eyes squinting with malice, "but I like it here. The contract was for a month right here on this ranch an' here I stay, and if anything should happen to make it unpleasant for me ——" He did not finish the sentence, but contented himself with twisting the spike.

Walrus tried diplomacy. "Fielding Spencer is due here tonight for his month's vacation. Yuh'll be glad to see yore old boss, huh?"

The question had an entirely different effect on Pug Parry from what might have been supposed. He dropped the spike and twisted his brow in thought. "Comin' tonight, is he? Shucks!"

Over at the other end of the bunkhouse Big Hat was making the final adjustments of tie and hat which marked the beginning of an eventful night. Rumor freely predicted that Big Hat was going to pop the question that night.

Dotty Manners had been blowing first hot then cold, but for all that it was easy to see that the big form of Pug Parry held for her a certain attraction, a fascination that seemed irresistible.

Old Walrus had summed the situation up nicely when he had remarked earlier that afternoon, "Dotty's really in love with Big Hat if she'd listen to her heart, but when this here big Pug's around her heart don't get a chance. She's got the idea she likes a manly man, a go gettum, two fisted heavyweight. Shucks!"

Big Hat, heedless of the conversation between Walrus and Pug, clanked to the door and swung into the saddle of his waiting horse.

Pug's eyes suddenly lit up with a cunning light. "Comin' tonight is he? An' she likes a go gettum, does she? Walrus, get me a hoss!"

Walrus sighed and gave an order to the wrangler. Fifteen minutes later Pug Parry was galloping toward Coyote City.

"Boys," piped Walrus, as soon as the sound of beating hoofs had gone well down the trail, "I've got me a hunch old Pug Parry is aimin' to go chase Big Hat off the reservation tonight. Mebbe some o' yuh better mosey on into town an' give things a once over to make sure they're all fair an' regular. Me, I gotta go on in an' meet this here Fielding Spencer when the eight o'clock bus gets in, an' some of yuh might just's well come along."

For a moment there was silence while the men looked at one another. Big Hat was one of the most popular men at the ranch, and Pug Parry's stock had rapidly dropped until it was greatly below par. Feet hit the floor, voices arose in excited comment while men trooped out to the dark corrals.

AT THE cashier's window of the Palace Theatre Big Hat was getting his. "Takin' it standin' up," as Walrus would have put it. In spite of the fact that his world was toppling about his ears he was standing with a frozen smile on his lips.

"No, Phil," Dotty Manners was saying, albeit with a sigh on her lips. "I may as well be frank. While there is much about you I admire, and while I care for you very much; still, I'm not in love with you. My prince charming must be a big man, one of the kind who will sweep me off my feet, a regular go-getter. Oh I can't tell you very well just what I mean, and I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I want a man who doesn't know what it is to be afraid, a big giant of a go-getter. Oh, Phil, I feel so funny. I just don't know how I do feel. I'll be a sister to you—Oh, how do you do, Mr. Parry! This is a lovely evening isn't it?"

Pug Parry growled at Phil, and smiled at the girl. Standing beside her with only the wicket of the cashier's window between them he appeared a veritable giant, nor did Big Hat Phil Dunton dispel the impression.

"Say," boomed Pug, "I got somethin' to say to yuh. It's somethin' I wouldn't care to have everyone in the whole state hear, an' maybe yuh could close up that window or perhaps get somebody else to take your place."

Her eyes lowered until the long lashes rested against her cheeks, while the warm color flooded her skin.

"Why — er — maybe — well, perhaps Mr. Dunton will excuse himself a while, and you can say anything you've got to say here, or maybe after the show——"

Pug turned to Big Hat, giving him a shove. "Beat it, kid!"

The shove knocked Phil's hat off where it fell with a plump on the floor of the theatre lobby. Appearing more diminutive than ever Phil stood white faced, looking up at the distorted features of the giant.

At that instant there came the honking of the horn of the eight o'clock bus as it pulled in from Yuma, but neither of the men heard it. Something there was in Phil Dunton's eyes that caused the girl to gasp, something that caused

big Pug Parry to reach in his pocket.

When Pug's hand came out he brought with it a piece of twisted spike. His great fingers began to twist and untwist the metal. When he had tied it into a veritable snarl of bends and twists, he again reached into his pocket.

"Look at this," he announced He had withdrawn a silver dollar. He took it in his fingers, gave a quick twist and bent it double.

"Look at this," he announced. He had standing on his tiptoes and smashing his open palm against Pug's cheek, "and then take this!" The slap was followed with a wild swing.

Pug Parry stood there. The blow fell upon his shoulder, hardly jarring his huge bulk. He looked down upon his diminutive antagonist with an expression of surprised incredulity, as though his eyes had not seen correctly.

Then, suddenly, there came over his face an expression of fear and he made for the door. Behind him, a wildly flying tornado of feet and fists came Big Hat Phil, urged on by that wild fury which is only known in men of small stature and big spirit.

Pug's retreat became a rout and he dashed madly down the street, Phil tearing along behind, swinging now and then to the back of the giant's head, administering a kick every few feet, begging the huge hulk to turn around and fight like a man.

Walrus stood at the edge of the dusty street, the suitcase of Fielding Spencer in his hand, the director standing at his side. With wide open eyes he watched the strange sight as Pug Parry, begging for mercy, dashed down the street, Big Hat Phil bringing up the rear. "Fer—the—love—o'—Mike!" he gasped.

The director laughed. "I see your men have taken Pug Parry's measure," he said.

Walrus turned to him. "Meanin' what?"

"Why, that man's a physical coward. I tried to tell you when you wanted him for the job. He's champion strong man but he's deathly afraid of fist fights. He got his face all mashed up in an automobile accident so that he's fearfully sensitive about it, but that, coupled with his great strength, makes him a valuable man to use as an extra in fight scenes; though even then we have to fake a lot of the stuff so that there's not the slightest chance of his getting hurt. As long as he can bluff a fellow by his stunts of twisting iron bars and all that he's a regular bully, but a two year old baby could run him off the ranch. I thought you'd found it out. I kept trying to tell you, but you wouldn't listen. You fell for his face and his strong man stunts."

The Walrus looked meditatively down the street, then back to the cashier's office of the picture show. "Say Spencer, do me a favor, will yuh?"

The director did not hesitate. "Uh huh."

"Wa'al, just don't say a word of that to any of the boys. Keep it under yore hat."

The visitor looked his surprise. "Why so, and for how long?"

Walrus cast his faded blue optic upon the form of Big Hat Phil who was marching back down the street, his chest thrown out, arms swinging, walking straight toward the Palace Theatre.

"Oh not very long," replied Walrus, "just until after the weddin' of this go-getter over there!"

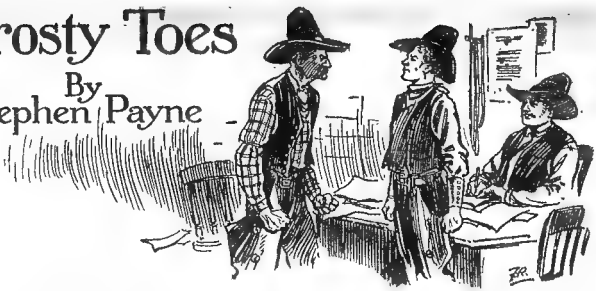
PERCUSSION RIFLE TYPES

IN THE colonial and early statehood days of our country the settlements were generally in a timbered section of the continent. Most of the hunting was done by men on foot; hence the evolution of the early American rifle with its extreme length of barrel, giving accuracy, flat trajectory and slight recoil.

After the tide of emigration crossed the Mississippi and the plains country was occupied, men hunted more on horseback and less on foot, then the rifle barrels were shortened and increased in weight and caliber, giving us the western type of rifle.

Frosty Toes

By Stephen Payne



Author of "Rope 'Em An' Tie 'Em," etc.

The bronc unloads Pinkie every time, and hardboiled Butch Hendrick snorts in disgust at the prevailing brand of waddies. "Frosty 'round the toes," he barks—so Pinkie sets out to refute the charge

FROSTY 'round the toes, eh? By cripes, yuh're goin' t' crawl him agin if y'u intends t' stick 'round this outfit!"

I tells it to a pink cheeked youngster as has been 'bout a week with us o' the J-Up and J-Down. He's jus' picked hisself—minus his hat an' some small patches o' hide—from Mother Earth's bosom after his third fall from old Sugar Foot, one o' the not quite gentle broncs I'd cut into his string.

His name's Rodney Melvin an' the boys has dubbed him "Pinkie" pronto. Guess y'u'd call him a nice kid, but I likes 'em little harder o' eye an' hornier o' hand. So far he's showed 'bout the ridin' ability of a straw man.

I'm Butch Hendrick, Watson's foreman. They call me hard—some goes a mite further. But, by cripes, yuh've gotta ride the class o' waddies we get nowadays. I tells it t' any of 'em—y'u betcha.

It's early mornin' at the ranch an' I'm stringin' the punchers out for their day's work. Half a dozen of 'em's settin' their cayuses, forgettin' t' drag at their near-alfalfy smell-bads as they waits for me an' Pinkie t' settle the argument.

"He throwed me four times yesterday," Pinkie quavers. "And it's no use tryin'. I jus' can't stick on him. I can't! This makes seven times that white eyed devil's downed me!"

"I gives a man a string o' hosses," I announces, "an' I expects said man t' ride that string. If yuh had any guts a-tall, yuh'd crawl up into the middle o' that old stove-up pelter an' whip his damn' eyes out! Humph, I never did see a pink cheeked, baby blue eye as sez please at the table an' eats with his fork as had the nerve o' a cottontail."

Pinkie regards me with a look o' wounded wonder, the kind o' look y'u see in the eyes of a dog as has been whipped without cause, and his bloodless face begins to flame. In the decided pause I observes the two hombres who'd stopped over night with us and is now ornamentin' the top o' the corral fence, sizin' up young Rodney through narrowed eyes. My glance at 'em's only casual, but I notes one of 'em's a beady eyed, weasel faced runty cuss an' 'tother's a flabby cheeked, boozy eyed big hunk o' tallow. Cowhands, I guesses; dressed like it anyhow, an' plenty six-shooters.

Pinkie speaks, "Do you mean that, Butch Hendrick? I *have* got nerve! I *ain't* cold footed! But it's jus' useless, my tryin' t' ride this hoss." An' he's darn nigh bawlin'.

One o' the punchers butts in, "Never worked for an outfit yet, as asked a man t' take over four falls from a cayuse he jus' couldn't ride," he remarks t' the world at large.

"Didn't I give y'u hombres yore orders?" sez I pretty curt. "Well, I ain't a-goin' with yuh, and frum the look o' things yuh needn't wait for chicken

heart here." I unhooks a thumb from my cartridge belt to stick it toward Rodney Melvin.

The waddies turns their hosses and begins t' mosey, but the glances they exchanges tells me that they think I'm wrong. That settles it for me. I won't back up a doggone inch now.

"Mean it?" I bawls at the kid. "Y'u heard me! Your feet's froze! Yuh're a chicken hearted quitter! Thar's yore mount. Ride him or git yore time!"

THE two strangers takes note o' me. I'm impressin' 'em, all right. Pinkie don't say nothin', jus' kinda strangles as he goes t' Sugar Foot an' takes his saddle an' bridle offen him. I knows how doggone bad the youngster wants t' punch for the J-Up an' J-Down, but—! He catches his own private hoss outa the remuda, saddlin' him. Next he points toward the main house. "My check?" he sez.

I nods. The strangers crawls down from the fence an' the four o' us moseys up t' the house. I s'poses Weasel Face an' Tub o' Tallow 'tends t' thank Watson for the 'commodations, but they stays outside as me an' Pinkie enters the settin' room unannounced.

Watson looks up quick. I see that he's closin' the business end o' the deal with the cattle buyers as come yesterday. There's three o' these buyers, all present. Yesterday, we'd cut out three hundred two year old steers for 'em. I'd jus' sent the boys t' start 'em for the railroad, but Watson'd told me t' stick 'round as he had 'nother job for me. I gets an inklin' o' what 'tis right off as we enters the room. On the table is the darndest pile o' bills, green and yeller, I've ever seen since I busted the faro game up at Daggett. That is, since I pretty nigh busted the game—well, anyhow, my system was right if only my wad'd 'a' held out little longer.

'Tain't the usual thing, but these buyers was payin' cash for the steers rather than bother t' get their checks certified an' all, 'round these little town banks. 'Course nobody knows they're packin' money and there's no bandits around anyway.

"Wasn't quite ready for you, Butch," says the big boss as my eyes bulge out.

"Eh? Oh, I come t' ask y'u for the kid's check. I fired him."

Watson's eyes rests on Pinkie. He'd hired the false alarm, not me. Pretty fine type o' man, Watson, but he's too easy; lets his heart get the best o' his head, y'u know. Needs a hard nut like me t' counterbalance things on a big ranch.

"Why?" he asks.

I specifically informs him. Pinkie don't hang his head, not a-tall. He keeps it high an' his eyes is smolderin' like coals.

"So?" comments Watson; his eyes, his look, and his frown displayin' displeasure as he attends t' Pinkie's check.

Through the window I abstractedly observes Tub o' Tallow loungin' against the yard fence. The tallest cattle buyer notices the same thing.

"Strikes me," he remarkes turnin' to his pards, "as more than coincidence that those two, er—er—wandering cowhands should make the same ranches we do three nights running."

"Yeh," one of his comrades looks outa the window. "I get you. Not a very nifty lookin' pair, but harmless. If they'd contemplated doing anything they'd have acted before now."

"Cash is no longer our problem," observes the third member. "It's going to be entrusted to capable hands," he adds, sizin' me up.

"Y'u betcha," I replies. "Half a dozen hard boiled bandits'd hesitate 'bout goin' up agin Butch Hendrick. I'm all fired quick on the draw if I do say so myself."

"I can well believe it," allows the tall buyer.

Watson hands Pinkie his check: "I—well, it's not my policy to question my foreman's judgment, Melvin," he says. "However, I'm rather sorry. I may add that I thought you a boy with a good deal of spunk." He holds out his hand.

Pinkie takes it with a chokin' sound, "Mr. Watson," he stammers, "you're plum' white, but this—this animal foreman of yours, he's handed me a raw deal. He's—oh, what's the use? I'd jus' give my right eye t' show him I have got nerve. I ain't chicken hearted! I ain't cold footed! I ain't——"

Anger and emotion overcomes him an' he ducks for the door.

I'M LOOKIN at that door as it opens an' shuts. Weasel Face is standin' nonchalantly jus' outside it, but I'm full o' this darned Pinkie, an'

the fact that any other hombre has no reason for bein' there, don't register.

"That boy's sure proddy," the tall cattle buyer tells me. "If there was any Mex or Indian about him I'd say he'd waylay you an' stick a knife in you."

"Let's forget it," suggests Watson as I grins my derision and taps my gat significant.

"I heard your remarks," Watson continues to the buyers. "I'm not at all nervous about sending this cash to Sage Springs in charge of Butch. He's a gunman scarcely anyone would care to tackle."

"But if a bandit gets the drop—?" ventures the tall buyer.

"Pouf, there are no bandits," Watson answers. "Those two birds you spoke of are the usual harmless drifting cowboys. However, keep your eyes open, Hendrick."

"No man can get the drop on Butch Hendrick," I informs the cattle buyers.

Watson gives me orders. Leaving the house I observes that Weasel Face, Tub o' Tallow, and Pinkie have all departed. As I'm goin' t' town I dolls up a little and it's about an hour later that I rolls the sack o' money in my coat, ties that behind my saddle and hits the trail for Sage Springs.

Joggin' along, I recollects that them two strangers didn't wait t' thank Watson for the 'commodation after all. I speculates about them a little. Didn't set their broncs like reg'lar cowhands. Didn't talk quite right either, come t' think of it. That Weasel Face certainly had wicked eyes, jus' like a weasel's. Well, they're gone. I thinks of other things.

It's thirty miles t' the Springs. The road, always pretty lonesome, winds through a low range o' timbered hills, nigh onto mountain size. At one place, closer t' town than home, the road forms a great horseshoe loop, half circlin' a mighty deep gully. An active man on foot could cut through the down timber 'nd rocks and reach the opposite side o' this gully afore a horseback could swing 'round the long half circle. And the pines are thick over it all.

My hoss is walkin' slow as I tops the rise where this giant curve begins, when the peaceful silence o' the forest is shattered by a voice from behind me at my right.

"Put 'em up, or I'll blow yore head off!"

Funny how fast your thoughts can function. I can't see the bandits; I figger there must be a dozen of 'em. I don't dast turn. I knows if I reaches for my gat it'll be goodnight. My hands jus' shoots up while a lakeful o' the Arctic Ocean runs down my spine.

"Look straight ahead!" hisses the voice. "Now, slow an' mighty careful lower your left hand—this trigger's powerful touchy. That's right. Unbuckle yore belt. Keep that right hand up! That's jake. Toss her back behind yuh."

I hears one o' 'em gettin' my belt an' gun, an' I starts t' say sump'n.

"Shut up!" barks the voice. "Untie that coat an' throw it back here!"

They ain't a thing else for me t' do. In a minute I hears one bandit lookin' it over. I senses, also, that there ain't but one of 'em, and I'm from chilly temperature t' boilin' in jus' one second.

"Good! Anything in yore pockets?" resumes my captor.

"No, yuh—" I bellers.

"Never mind—I'll take yore word for it." The stick up man's still mighty curt. "Y'u can look if yuh want t', but flag yore kite an' keep goin' or I'll make a sieve outa yuh!"

I takes one look as I digs my spurs in. It's an eyeful. I can't believe said eyes. It's Pinkie! An' he's *alone!* He looks like a wild man as has been in a fight with a lynx cat. His clothes is all tore and his face is gory. I don't savvy the why o' it, but I does savvy that he's a powerful uncompromisin' gun pointed my way, 'nd the look behind it ain't invitin' me t' linger.

"Yah, it's me!" he spits. "Me, the frosty toed! Hit the trail t' the sheriff. I'll entertain y'u all!"

I GETS, y'u betcha! I'm flabbergasted, humiliated, an' plain white hot mad all at oncet. The pink faced, chicken heart stuck me up an' got away with it. Talk about takin' revenge; he's a-doin' it! If I had a gun—! I'll get the sheriff an'—! I fogs my hoss 'round that curve, but the hill's sharp at 'tother side an' my mount slows at its crest. An' then——

Forked lightnin' and red hot hailstones! Two masked men steps out from behind trees, pointin' pistol bar-

rels the size o' phonograph horns straight at me. Their "Hands up!" slaps me like a red hot brandin' iron.

"Twicet!" I yaps like a crazy man.

"Shut up!" snaps the little bandit, 'nd to his pard, "Get the swag."

Well, there ain't no swag. I tries t' tell 'em so. They figgers I'm lyin'. They goes plum' loco, but not loco enough t' forget t' keep me covered. They peels off my saddle, shakes out the blanket, looks into the saddle itself. Nothin'!

They begins on me. Boots an' hat first comes off, then vest, pants, and shirt. Thus stripped an' plum' helpless I'm jus' a-frothin' at the mouth. There's nothin' left t' explore.

The flabbergasted bandits masks is all awry an' I recognizes 'em, Weasel Face an' Tub o' Tallow. So, that's why they was snoopin' 'round the house. I recollects a lot that I should 'a took notice of. They're ready t' listen t' me at last. I tells 'em how the dang pink faced softie'd fleeced me. They exchanges incredulous looks, believin' me, 'cause my words come out jus' a sizzlin'.

"But he couldn't 'a' got loose," says Tub o' Tallow, and to me, "If he did get loose, he couldn't 'a' stuck y'u up, 'cause he didn't have no gun!"

"Gwan! He sure had one an' knowed how t' use her!"

"Gwan, yerself," snarls Weasel Face. "We left him tied with his own rope back in the woods."

Then Tub o' Tallow explains. They hadn't been sure the cattle buyers had a roll. They'd suspected it and followed 'em, but they weren't takin' any unnecessary chances. This mornin' they'd heard an' seen plenty. My row with Pinkie'd give 'em the idea o' gettin' him t' pull the job, after they found out I was goin' to take the money to town. So, knowin' how hot Pinkie was at me, they overtook him on the road an' put it to him, t' rob me. 'Course they was goin' t' rob him right afterwards, but they didn't tell him that. Sheriff'd be after Pinkie, while Weasel Face an' Tub o' Tallow'd be beatin' it 'nother way.

Well, Pinkie'd listened t' the scheme; then told 'em t' go t' hell. They had the drop on him while he was tellin' 'em.

They beat him pretty nigh senseless for bein' so senseless, an' left him tied with his own rope back in the timber well off the road. The facts stuck out that he'd got loose, beat them hombres t' the swag, an' made monkeys outa the three o' us.

I'm the biggest ape, for I'm standin' there all the time Tub o' Tallow's 'splainin', practically naked, an' feelin' like seven kinds of a fool.

They now suggests that we throws in together an' hunts Pinkie. They're hotter even'n I am. No, they ain't goin' t' arm me, I'm t' act as guide, knowin' the country. I ain't hankerin' for their company. God, if they gets the money, what'll they do t' me? They sees what I'm thinkin'.

Weasel Face squeals, "We'll fix this mutt so's he'll never git away or blab!" He goes on t' tell Tallow he needn't interfere. "We don't want no sheriff out here. We'll find that—ourselves."

Lookin' into his eyes—jus' black glitterin' pinpoints—I knows he's goin' t' kill me an' think no more o' it than o' stickin' a pig, that bird. I jus' begins t' whine an' beg. Imagine a man like me, as has been mighty cocky an' lorded it over everybody, in the shape I'm in? I'm jus' like a rabbit beggin' mercy from a weasel, an' my case is jus' as hopeless. My plea gets me nothin', 'though Weasel Face tantalizes me for a minute or two.

"I'm a goin' t' walk back ten steps, wheel an' fire," sez he.

I gives up an' closes me eyes waitin' for the shot with the awfullest fear a man can feel, when a voice shrills, "*Hands up!*"

MY EYES snap open. Weasel Face fires at where the voice comes from—twice, three times, quicker'n double greased lightnin'. Gosh, talk about a gunman—! The new bandit or rescuer's hid behind a tree. His answer roars. Weasel spins with a busted shoulder, falls, catchin' his weapon with his left hand even as he does, an' blazes away once more. Another answerin' roar an' his left hand's tore half off. All jus' in the wink o' an eye. Tub o' Tallow, his mug sea green, has hoisted his arms t' oncet.

Then my eyes jus' leaves my head an' my jaw falls off entirely as Pinkie, Rodney Melvin, comes from behind a tree. "Tie them two damn' crooks up!" he barks at me, watchin' 'em lynx eyed.

I obeys him, best I can, for my nerves is sure frayed.

"How come?" I manages at last. "What y'u goin' t' do t' me?"

"Am I cold footed? Have I got nerve?" he snaps out.

"Nerve!" I gurgles. "Nerve! Yuh're jus' one gob o' it!"

"All right," he sez quieter. "We'll take these birds t' Sage Springs. Kinda figger they're wanted. I got the money all safe an' my hoss is hid back there in the timber with theirn."

"But, what—? Then y'u ain't a bandit?" I stutters.

"Me a bandit?" he grins. "I sure been enjoyin' watchin' them real bandits play with Butch Hendrick, the bold gunman. Y'u see they let fall where they intended doin' the job. I was on hand 'fore y'u arrived. Had t' nab them. Treated me rough. Left me t' die, in fact. My rope was rawhide an' they overlooked a rain pool not far from me, but if y'u hadn't delayed I'd never 'a' made it. Thought that darn rope never would soak 'nuff t' stretch." He breaks off an' laughs out loud.

"Butch, y'u sure were a comical figure—are yet. But y'u've kinda lost a lot o' your bluff an' brag with your clothes. Wonder if I'd better tell the boys?"

"Pinkie, Pinkie—" I pleads. "Oh, well—I can't ask a thing after the way I treated yuh. But if y'u don't tell 'em, I'll—I'll——"

"Don't say it," he interrupts. "Yu're hardboiled and unreasonable, but y'u're a good foreman and I like Watson and the J-Up and J-Down."

"Then y'u won't tell what a figure I cut?" I manages. "Why, I'd 'a' thought y'u'd 'a' let Weasel Face kill me."

"'Course not! Showin' y'u I wasn't cold footed was enough for me."

I gapes at him. I'm seein' him in a new light. He's sure a nervy, square shootin' lad an' plumb white, but some things is still botherin' me. I voices 'em. Why did he hold me up? Why didn't he jus' warn me?

Pinkie studies his answer. "I was determined to show y'u I had nerve. Y'u wouldn't have heeded a warning, bein' so cocksure o' yourself. Takin' the money from y'u I was sure of its safety if I slipped up on this end o' the job. Thing was t' nab these two skunks redhanded. I was afraid of Weasel Face; didn't dare go against him *without a gun*. So I just took yours off'n yuh and everything was jake!"

PAWNEE ROCK

THIS rock, a famous landmark on the old Sante Fé Trail, was situated about half way between the present towns of Great Bend and Larned, Kansas; but the interesting part of it is there no longer, having been used for building materials. A very early traveler described it as being volcanic in nature, red in color and of cellular or porous construction. Technically, it was ferruginous sandstone. Its name is said to have been given to it from a fight which took place at it in 1826 between a band of Pawnees and a fur caravan of St. Vrain's on its way between the mountains and the Missouri settlements.

West of Walnut Creek a backbone of rock rose above the prairie, higher and higher toward its southern end, where it abruptly ended, its steep face overlooking the Arkansas River and the Santa Fé Trail, and giving a radius of view from its summit over the prairie for fifteen miles. To the north was its own prolongation and the prairies beyond; to the east and west the monotonous expanse of the plain with its carpet of buffalo grass and the two distant lines of deep green where the timber showed the positions of Walnut and Pawnee Creeks. During the days when buffalo were plentiful the prairie was literally covered with them all around the rock. General Kearney and his scouts, standing on the top of the rock, estimated the number of buffalo within their range of vision to be from 500,000 to 800,000, it was in the heart of the buffalo's favorite grazing grounds, a fact that made it a bloody place in the wars between the Indians. Like Independence Rock, it served as a register of the plains, for its walls were covered with the names of passers-by.—CLARENCE E. MULFORD.

BUFORD BULLDOGS BACK

by Walter A Sinclair

Better by far at throwing beef than at tossing the castanet dominoes, Bufe Holt found himself in one of the most trying positions ever faced by a cowboy come to the Pendleton Round-Up. When a tinhorn gambler tried to make a sure thing of the bulldogging, however, Bufe saw the way clear to a hard ride and a ten second fall.

CLICK, went the speckled bones, and Buford Holt was cleaned. His last dollar was swept up from beneath his indignant nose by the cold faced young slicker who had been entertaining the cowboys in the smoker with his galloping cubes to while away the long train ride through Oregon's Blue Mountains, en route to Pendleton. Bufe neared the big round-up in a condition of complete financial collapse. "Even my entry fee is done gone," he mourned. "And a bulldogger without'n his entry fee has as much chance at the Round-Up as a s'lidified alcohol steer in hades. Why'd a simp like me ever leave San Miguel county?"

Back in New Mexico the ranch hands graded Bufe as the coming contender for the bulldogging championship. On the Square-O Ranch he'd done his daily dozen steers for a flop, practicing to represent his State fittingly. He had tossed the saltiest longhorns they sent at him, and his time had been getting steadily better. And now!

A long, lean, drawling son of the Southwest, he had hit the Oregon trail in late summer in the pink of condition. He aimed to give those Northwest hands a sample of real bulldogging from the place where they wrote the words and music of it.

"A city slicker in a cowboy hat, taking me fo' a ride with them Dahomey dominoes like a tourist in a sightseeing bus," he grieved as, at the very threshold of the roundup city, the door of opportunity was slammed in his face. "Thass shore 'nuff to make a boy powerful low in his mind. Jest when I was goin' to put my brand on the bulldogging purse."

Adding to his gloom were thoughts of that other attraction which had lured him to make the trip way up into Oregon. Romance was riding herd on him and heading him north. Ever since Las Vegas, he had dreamed of meeting up again with Jessie Boynton, who had done trick riding at the Cowboy's Reunion and who was to appear at the Pendleton Round-Up.

Jessie was a mighty cute trick. Of course, one had to be a tall cowboy of Bufe's stature to think of her as such, for Jessie was no midget. A slender, graceful girl with long, shapely legs which wound themselves around a horse, she made a dashing trick rider. Her face was rather thin and serious, but there was a daring light which flickered unexpectedly in her eyes and which kept her admirers guessing. She traveled the rodeo circuit with her brother, Lincoln Boynton, a trick roper.

Buford Holt had acquired a new green shirt with black crossed stripes as the big number in his roundup costume. Even though a bulldogger doesn't need much but a pair of overalls while demonstrating his stuff, Bufe wanted to look well when he met Jessie. His old brown, two gallon hat still could be blocked to look well, and his fancy tooled boots would have to do, but he aimed to lay in a few new duds when he landed in

Pendleton. Traveling by day coach, he went light as to wardrobe. And now his money was gone.

Andy Fanshaw, the stranger in the smoking car called himself. His big hat didn't make him a cowboy, but those two bone cubes he clicked so tantalizingly had brought the waddies around him just as surely as a burning candle attracts the moths.

Craps is the cowboys' vestpocket guide to wealth and "bone preferred" enjoyed an active market. For a time the four cowboys who dabbled in this stock seemed to be holding their own. Then a big pot was built up, and the trained ivories performed for the stranger.

Gambling was akin to breathing and eating with Bufe, and craps was his little pal on range and in town. Spurred on by his desire for plenty of money to make a flash before Jessie and to show her a good time, Bufe showered down everything that wasn't nailed tight. In other words, everything he had. Then —bam! It vanished.

Entirely surrounded by gloom, Bufe Holt reached Pendleton. Carnival spirit and general hilarity pervaded the Oregon town, but this was not for Bufe. Hundreds of miles from the ranch and broke, he landed thoroughly bewildered.

The town was as full of two gallon hats as a wet yard is full of toadstools, and not a familiar face under any of them. Bufe made his way in gloom to the roundup headquarters, and bashfully tried to talk his entry into the contest. Owing to a superfluity of bulldoggers with entry money to do their talking for them, he was no linguistic success. Kindly enough, he was told that the entry fee had to be on the line if he was going to compete in the gentle art of throwing steers on their sides.

Heaving a sigh from the bottoms of his artistically tooled boots, he turned away and ran spang into Hackamore Durfee.

Hack was an Oregon puncher with a scientific grasp of the horn twist which put salty steers in a now-I-lay-me position in jig time. He had just nosed out Bufe at Las Vegas, and Holt had been properly impressed by his rival's ability. After the reunion they had foregathered as top hands always do, in friendliest sociability, and Hackamore had been the open handed host to the less experienced rodeo contender, treating him and giving him many helpful hints.

Now, before Bufe could dodge behind a post, Durfee had seen him and hailed him. With much shoulder thumping, he shook hands with his rival of the preceding affray, and welcomed him to the morrow's lists. Hack Durfee was short and broad, with wide and powerful shoulders. Not as young as Bufe, neither did he have the latter's physical attractions. His hair was a rebellious sorrel, fringing the top of a ruddy, good natured face which bore the marks of many a leap which had been miscalculated. Steers grading eight hundred pounds and moving with the impetus of runaway ice wagons had marked that face with ineffaceable scars. It hadn't been much of a prize beauty to begin with, having pale eyebrows and light blue eyes. Nevertheless it radiated the warmest geniality, .

"You ole telegraft pole, trying to hide behind these runts and culls," accused Hackamore reproachfully. "How fast do I have to work tomorrow to keep you from grabbing day money?"

"Hackamo', yore a-goin' to have a clear field 's' far's I'm figgered," confessed Bufe, sheepishly. "Oregon's no place fo' a pore boy f'um the range country. Waited ontil they got me awmost hyar and then a slicker taken me to the cleaners with a pair of eddicated dice. Left me this elegant shirt to my back but nary the price of a entry fee. Hence and so forth, I'm outer the runnin'."

"Not never. Not until the last steer gets the flag," denied Hackamore. "Why, you ole come-on, you don't think we'd invite you up here and then not beat you proper? I'll stake you to the entry fee."

"Why, Hack, thass plumb ridiklus," protested Buford. "Means yo're inviting shore defeat putting me in ag'in yo' when yo' could jest as well leave me out and probably win the big purse."

"After that you couldn't tie me from getting you into this contest," snorted Hackamore. Peeling off some bills, he shoved them at the roundup entry recorder, demanding, "Enter a punk entitled Buford Holt of San Miguel, New Mexico, among the amateurs that I'm a-going to push over in the bulldogging. Make a record of this, so's I can collect from him some day when he gets into a

contest ag'in a bunch from the Old Cowboys Home or signs up with some dude ranch. C'mon, cowboy. Let's drift."

"Looky hyar, Hack," complained Bufe, when they were walking away. "I shore am grateful to yo' fer putting me in the contest, but looky hyar. Yo're a-cramping my style. How'm I a-going to beat a waddie what pays to drag in onnecessary competition ag'in himse'f? I know yo' hain't expectin' that in retu'n I'm to lay down."

"Betcher life not, Bufe," assured Hackamore. "You're a-going to do your best to beat me, but I'm not going to let it be said that a little thing like a entry fee kept you from giving me a workout. I'm paying for the privilege of beating you because you're the likeliest bulldogger that's rounded up against me at this here roundup. Do your dangedest and don't think about my staking you. And here's a little dough to live on until you grab maybe some second money or something from the contest."

He pressed another bill on the unwilling Holt. "Sorry, but I gotter leave you now, ole timer, and get me dolled up a bit," Hackamore apologized, starting away. Turning he added, "I'd insist on having you to chow tonight, only I've got a heavy previous date. Guess you know the party that's putting on the feed bag with me tonight. Remember Jessie Boynton? A neat little number —and boy! I aims to make a life hit with her, for she's my idea of first money."

Had Hackamore looked back he would have viewed a completely stricken Buford Holt. That puncher was in a trance, too dazed to mouth a protest or to shout for Hack to take back his *dinero*. Hackamore Durfee, in a burst of genuine kindness, had handicapped Bufe entirely in their professional and romantic rivalries. It wasn't fair.

"Why'n't he tell me he was a-cou'ting Jessie?" demanded Bufe of just no one in particular. "Hyar he'd done gone cinched me up with a entry fee and a stake and then dares me to beat him fo' the purse or the gal. It jest hain't right to bog a boy down thataway!"

THESE mournful ruminations were terminated abruptly by the personal appearance of the chief occupant of his thoughts. A flivver sped up, and out sprang Jessie Boynton herself, greeting the lugubrious New Mexican Romeo. The cowgirl registered real pleasure without an effort, for Bufe was far from homely, being a rather romantic looking boy. His dark hair, now, had a sort of wavy effect, and his tanned face when he smiled was warming. Riding had developed gracefulness in his body that added to the general good report.

"Buford Holt, all the way from New Mexico, maybe to see me," tantalized Miss Boynton, who knew a lot about cowboys from close observation of the species. She had driven over to complete her arrangements with the management for herself and Link Boynton, and she bade young Mr. Holt to stand without picketing while she spent a few minutes in conference. When she emerged, she invited him to a lift in her taxi, and settled down to complete the spell which she knew plenty well enough she had cast over him at their first meeting.

"You did come to see me, didn't you?" she challenged when they had skirmished through labored observations concerning the weather. Jessie was a modern girl who brooked practically no nonsense about getting immediate first hand information regarding her admirers' intentions.

"Shore done so, Miss Jessie. Shore done a power of thinking about yo' since we done parted," confessed Bufe.

"Well, that's a comfort to know," sighed Jessie. "I'm always afraid some schoolma'am or flapper will kidnap any nice cowboy I take a fancy to. Frankly, I haven't given you a thought since we parted."

"Reckon mebbe so yo're jokin' me," gloomed Bufe hopefully. Her presence was irresistible. Words suddenly broke corral and stampeded out of him. "Can't yo' take me serious and gimme a little hope, Jess? I shore would admire powerful to have you say—I got a chance."

"Why, Bufe, I like you immensely," stated Jessie. "But not as a permanent fixture. No, you won't do, not as you grade now. You're too ambitionless. And you gamble—and lose. I can't afford a loser. I've been making good money at rodeos until I've become used to good living and good clothes. You couldn't give me those on a cowhand's

pay, and you wouldn't ask me to be satisfied with that, if I grade you rightly. Get busy and win here, show me you can make good at something in speedy company and—well, maybe then I'll consider your entry, Bufe. Honestly, I like you a lot."

"Is it—?" began Bufe, dry throatedly. He wanted to ask if Hack was the favored one, but he could not finish his question, and contented himself with letting it die in the chute. They rode in strained silence to her hotel, and there parted.

The love laden cowboy shopped for a room within his means, and then wrapped himself around a steak after ordering "something that hadn't quit hoofing long, warmed around the edges." Having packed this away pronto, he had time to drift around town while the more prosperous celebrants were dallying over the evening chuck. Irresistibly he was drawn toward the hotel where Jessie was parked, and as he passed one of its dining room windows, he peered in, to discover her seated with Hackamore Durfee.

To the jealousy gnawed Bufe they appeared powerful chummy and contented together, lingering over plenty high grade grub. Hack was doing the big butter and egg stuff proper, and Jessie seemed to be responding favorably to kind treatment. She sparkled toward her host, lavishing a stock of alluring glances and some bright chatter upon Durfee.

"Wal, ole Banquet's ghost himse'f!" exclaimed a hearty voice at the side of the spying cowboy. Bufe faced about to find Tucumcari Tyler, a bronc rider, grinning knowingly. "Window shopping? Or aire you feasting yore eyes on Hack Durfee playing the menu fo' Jessie Boynton?"

"He shore is treatin' her royal," muttered Bufe, abashed at being discovered.

"Why not?" demanded Tucumcari. "They're a-going to get hitched as soon as Hack wins the bulldogging purse and gits him a stake fo' to start being married. Money makes the marriage go, yo' know, and even a reg'lar winner like Hack has got to have plenty *dinero* fo' furniture."

Bufe goggled through the window, stunned by what he had heard, while Tucumcari prattled on about their acquaintances who were assembling to make an Oregon holiday. Holt knew that Tuc was talking but he didn't hear a word he said. Lost in a fog of blighted hopes, the lanky, love lorn bulldogger from the mesa country groped his way back to his room and disconnected himself from his boots. For a long time he sat on his bed, aimlessly waving his artistic leg casings.

Finally he reached his great resolve. Here was Hack, a good old scout who had staked him to a chance at the steer wrestling purse, regardless of imperilling his own chances by adding a strong contender. And here was Jessie whom he loved with a hopeless sort of devotion. And here was he, a drifting cowpuncher who hadn't shown enough speed to entitle him to the gal. He would make them a wedding present of the purse by throwing the contest to Hackamore, if so be it narrowed down to the two of them.

Whether it was gratitude or a romantic gesture of the old school remains for some student of mental processes to determine. Having made his great renunciation, Bufe rolled heavily into bed and slept as only a cowhand can. It had given him quite a kick to present his rival with something he did not possess.

Opening day brought interests enough to make him forget his blighted passion. Pendleton was alive with visitors, both tourists and cowboys. All activities gave way to the big show that the town put on. Bandylegged cowmen swaggered around in hats that added a foot to their stature. Beside the arena was the picturesque Indian camp, with the real beauties of the Umatillas and Walla Wallas finally producing in the flesh those redskin charmers of old time fiction. Bead chaplets encircled glossy black hair, the only unbobbed tresses left in the land. Feathered bucks who had arrived in nickeled cars, brushed up on the horsemanship which was their heritage. Fat squaws prepared the pappooses for the baby contest.

The broncs and the wild horses had their cheering sections, but with the letting out of the wrestling steers a hush fell on the crowd, and betting flourished. When his turn arrived, Bufe sidled toward the chutes, mounted on an impatient little bay which had been farmed out to him on a percentage basis. Tucumcari was hazing for him.

"Let him out!"

A resounding thwack of a slat livened the stupid eight hundred pound beef, which bolted out of the chute and thudded across the tape. The flag dropped sharply. As though attached to the mechanism which operated the flagman's arm, Bufe's horse swung smartly and dashed over the line. With a rush, they were beside the lumbering steer, the hazer holding it to a true course while Bufe ranged alongside, uttering the strange, formless cries of his calling. Seeming not to hesitate a moment, he threw himself straight and true to the longhorn's withers.

In the same movement, he grasped the steer's horns and used his bootheels as brakes on the ground. The instant the longhorn was stopped, Bufe twisted the critter's head until its muzzle pointed skyward. It was a scientific, compelling twist that moved along the spine, forcing the steer to flop neatly on the turf, all fours out. Instantly the mounted flagman alongside dropped his red banner and the judges' stop watches clicked.

"Thirteen seconds," bawled the megaphone man a half minute later, and the stands thundered applause. It was the day's best time.

That night Buford Holt was a solvent institution, heeled with day money ample to pay his debt to Hackamore and have some left over. However, Hack was not to be found, being busy entertaining Jessie Boynton. Bufe solaced himself with a session of the bones with waddies he could trust, and he emerged considerably wealthier.

This gave him a margin to amplify his wardrobe the following day. A glorified Bufe, greatly improved by haberdasher and barber, hovered about the arena that forenoon, watching Jessie practicing her trick riding. When he importuned her to take noonday chuck with him, she put him off with vague references to a previous engagement. Right here a secret may as well be divulged. She did that to put Bufe on his mettle and to make him more determined to show his stuff.

This treatment brought on a bad reaction as far as Bufe was concerned. Or it may have missed aim and hit Hack. At all events, when the second day's bulldogging was concluded, Hack had won day money with an elapsed time of twelve and a half seconds against Bufe's fourteen flat. Each hopeful swain had a day's win to his credit, while their time totals read: "B. Holt, 27 sec., H. Durfee, 26½ sec." Their third tussle with the Hackenschmidt steers would decide the issue, but Bufe would have to overcome Durfee's half second margin in order to win, if win either of them did at all.

THAT just wasn't Bufe's day. Instead of leaving promptly, he tarried at a crap game which had been started on a blanket spread beside the horse corral. Before the measled clickers had cantered many circuits he had been vacuum cleaned again.

"Jest a plumb hoodooed no 'count," he upbraided himself as he sat disconsolately in his room enjoying extra portions of gloom. "A fine prospect I'd be fo' a nice gal like Jessie. Why didn't I pay off Hack whilst I had it, so's I could go after him hard tomorrer? Now I gotter be under obligations to him and th'ow the contest to him on one hand or on t'other I gotter do my dangedest to win to keep f'um starving. Mebbe I can catch me a job with some outfit near hyar, because ole Hack shore wins the contest and the gal tomorrer or I'm a plumb ingrate. Yessuh, if his time is best when my steer is turned out'n the chute, I reckon I've gotter lose by an eyebrow to good ole Hack. Why'd I let him tie me?"

A cautious tap sounded on his door. Opening it, Bufe was astonished to see Andy Fanshaw, the bones expert, slip in.

"No use anyone else seeing me here," announced the trainer of educated dice, hastily shutting the door behind him. "Howdy, cowboy. You been getting some bad breaks."

"I opine a autopsy of them trick cubes of yorn would show up that it was mo' mechanical injynooity than my tough luck," groused Bufe.

"Now, pardner, don't fly off the handle. I'm here to do you a good turn," soothed the slicker, restraining himself under the broad accusation. "My ivory cubes'll assay 99 point 44 pure. Moreover, I hear you ain't reaped no fortune in a game where I wasn't present, so why make nasty cracks at me? I'm seeking to do you a favor."

"So yo' said befo'," reminded Bufe, ungraciously. "I hea'd yo' the fust time. Seein' as how yore so secret about it, I opine yo' don't crave to tell

the world yore showering me with favahs."

"Let's not waste time crabbing," urged Fanshaw. "You're broke, and I know it. The chances are that you'll lose tomorrow. Now the trouble with you rodeo fellers is that you ain't practical. You pay your own expenses and risk your necks and mebbe get just exactly nothing. That's why you don't figger as a big national sport outside of these Western sticks. Americans admire a good business man, in sport as well as anywhere else."

"I kinder git yore drift," growled Bufe, balling his fists.

"Don't be foolish, feller," admonished Fanshaw. "You may notice I keep my right hand in my pocket. It may hold a nice piece of change for you, or a gat. Listen sensible. The losers in box fights or World Series baseball get a nice loser's end of dough. But in rodeo, it's win or lose all. You'll probably lose to this Hackamore Durfee tomorrow, but I can place plenty bets if that was a sure thing. Talk business, cowboy."

Bufe gaped. This gambler was sounding him about throwing the bulldogging contest—betting on a fixed contest. "Aire yo' propositioning me fo' to th'ow—?" he began in tense rage and indignation. Then his throat constricted upon his virtuous denunciation. Why, the fellow was offering him money to do exactly what he had intended doing. So what was the difference? Why be a priggish, impractical fool when he intended to throw the contest anyway?

"You get me," snapped Fanshaw, keen to sense the sudden abating of heat and the commencement of that mental conflict which he attributed to avarice. "If I don't make myself clear, money talks. Wouldn't you rather have five hundred sure than risking all for the big purse and maybe getting just nothing net? Five centuries, as certain as we're standing here."

"How do I know yo' won't jest say that and then run out on me?" temporized Bufe, angling to draw out the fixer. "After yo' collects all that impohtant money on this, what's to keep yo' f'um skipping?"

"Say the word and I'll hand you two hundred now in advance," proffered the gambler. From his vest pocket he produced two fresh new orange backs which he waved tantalizingly. "As much as you'd make herding steers in four-five months, just as an advance. The balance on delivery. You see, I trust you, even if you try to high hat me."

"Yo' low down, ornery sidewinder!" began Bufe, finally exploding with the indignation which had expanded him. He essayed an angry step toward Fanshaw, and the fellow's right hand, still hidden in his coat pocket, swung up level with the cowboy's midriff.

"Hold it! I told you I had a rod," warned the gambler. "I came here to talk business, not to muss up with a boob cowhand. You can punch cattle but you can't punch me without my putting tunnels through you. Be sensible and keep your health, no matter how you feel. I've got a man ready to swear you sent for me, so don't start anything, or we'll say you tried to bargain and hold me up."

"I hain't riled none whatsoever because yo' picked on me fer yore dirty proposition," snarled Bufe. "It's because yo' tried to crook the squarest sport they is."

"Applesauce," sneered Fanshaw, holding the drop and feeling behind him with his free hand. He pulled open the door without ever taking his gaze off Holt. As he backed into the hallway, he added in a feignedly pleasant tone, "Good night, Holt. I've enjoyed our little chat, and think it may work out mutually beneficial."

With that he closed the door in Buford's face, but not before Holt had seen another cowboy passing down the hallway.

SLEEP eluded him for hours that night. Wrestling a steer proved to be easy compared with wrestling with this problem which had been thrust upon him. Around and around his mental arena he pounded in pursuit of the answer, trying to get a good horn hold on the question.

"Jest *gotter* win! I cain't th'ow that contest," groaned the thought tortured cowboy as he tossed on his uneasy couch. "It hain't no better to sell out and th'ow a contest fo' a entry fee than it is fo' five hundred iron men. I jest gotter do my best. Hackamo'd want it thataway, and Jess would, too. Tomorrer I'm a-goin' in to *win!*"

With that came peace and slumber. Morning brought a renewal of self con-

fidence and a clear head. The tall boy from San Miguel was filled with determination. Not only was he *not* going to throw any contest, but he was going to win both the purse and Jessie Boynton. He wasn't going to drop out just because Hack seemed to have the inside track, or because he was grateful to Durfee. Gratitude didn't mean that a man had to void the right to do his best. And hadn't Jessie taxed him with being ambitionless?

Owing to his depressed financial condition, Buford kept out of sight until an hour before the day's contests began. When he entered the arena shortly before starting time, his eager gaze searched around the grounds. Over beside the stand he located the tall white stetson and vivid red breeches which ornamented Jessie. And then his eager, happily expectant face suddenly fell.

She was talking with Andy Fanshaw.

Thunder browed, Bufe strode toward the pair who were oblivious of his approach. Jessie was talking animatedly, almost smilingly, to the gambler, and Fanshaw wore a smirk intended to be captivating. He nodded some agreement. Upon this friendly scene burst Bufe.

"Get away f'um that gal, yo' sidewinder!" he ordered in hot indignation. "Jump a fence befo' I jest natcherly——"

"Buford Holt, mind your business," snapped Jessie, interposing herself between the two men. Her face was angry and determined as she faced the raging cowboy. "Kindly turn tail and meander off. I asked this man over here for a private conversation, and you'll favor us by backing out. I'm quite capable of taking care of myself."

"Yo' get away f'um that feller," roared Bufe. "Jessie—"

"Go. And don't speak to me again until you know how to address me properly," she commanded. Her face was perfectly calm now, and Bufe wavered and then fell back before her evident determination.

From afar off the dismayed and puzzled bulldogger watched the pair stroll off together toward a well known rodeo fan who was seated with his party in a box. Filled with resentment Bufe turned away and swaggered off to prepare for the parade. Among the waiting contestants he encountered Hackamore Durfee.

"Here's where I trim you and hang up the deciding score," taunted Hackamore, good naturedly.

"Not me, Hack," retorted Bufe. "But I'm powerful sorry I didn't pay yo' back yore loan after beating yo'. Hate to have to beat yo' today."

"Forget that. I wasn't aiming to remind you of that," declared Hackamore. "You're good for it with me. Go in and win, if you can."

There he was again, tying Bufe's hands with real kindness! Holt moved away before Durfee could say anything else to weaken his resolve about winning. He kept his distance until the bulldogging began. Through accident or possibly through somebody's sense of the dramatic, they were the last two on the list, Bufe being the final man to go across the tape. The time made by the others was nowhere near the marks already set by Bufe and Hack, and unless these two suffered unexpected reversals of form or drew tricky steers, one of them was bound to win.

Hackamore's pony gave him a bad break as his steer lumbered out, hesitated and tried to turn aside. The eager horse had made for the starting line, nicely gaited to cross at correct distance behind the longhorn, if the steer had gone straight ahead. But it didn't. As a result, Hack had to pivot his mount toward the chutes while several arena hands waved and shouted the beef critter into a startled run. With his hazer roaring on the off side of the steer, Hackamore raced alongside, and made his quick, sure jump. Followed some seconds of being dragged, then the steer was down.

"Hack-amore Dur-fee-ee's time, ee-lev'n seconds," bawled the megaphone man. Thunders of applause greeted this official announcement. Hack had lowered his own previous mark. It was this rodeo's quickest time, unless Bufe could pull it down a full second. A fraction would beat Hack on that day, but Bufe would have to be a whole second faster to beat his rival on totalled time for their three clashes. Betting broke out in the stands like an epidemic in Asia. Money was waved frantically as Bufe and his hazer rode up to the chutes. Big wagers swept the boxes.

Sitting on the timbers above the chutes, dangling her long red legs, Jessie Boynton smiled encouragingly down on

Bufe. Just as the gate swung open, she cupped her hands around her mouth and cried, "Win!"

Character works out in action. The Buford Holt who went straight in that matter affecting his honor now went straight as a speeding arrow in his pursuit of the galloping steer. If there are any powers controlling luck, they worked for him that day, holding his steer to a straight ahead course. Or maybe it was the good hazing of Tucumcari Tyler, who loped alongside of the lumbering beef critter, keeping it from making any abrupt turns without giving the prescribed hand signals.

Crouched tense for the spring and counting off the seconds in his mind, Bufe raced up to the steer and, without an instant's hesitation, leaped. His hands seized the horns and were twisting them almost before his bootheels dug into the turf. The steer stopped—and dropped.

Explosions of applause rocked the stands, subsiding only after the megaphone man, following his conference with the timers, waved pathetically for silence. When quiet had been restored to a degree, his booming roar announced: "Buford Holt's time——*ten seconds flat.*"

All preceding din was dwarfed by the crash of enthusiasm which greeted this. Yells, whoops, whistling, handclaps, and stamping of feet threatened to wreck the stand. Then, out of the bellowing, waving mass of humanity broke a man with three or four others grasping at him. Beating about him right and left, the fellow sought to disengage the hands which clung to his clothes. His hat was gone, and in a twinkling the coat had been torn in shreds from his back. His right hand struck out with something black and compact. A man fell.

Instantly the fugitive who had fought his way into the box tier, leaped over the rail into the arena and started to run across the open space, flourishing that black, compact object as he stampeded.

"Welcher!" howled the angry mob behind him. Men begun hurdling the rail in his wake, but they hesitated when he swung his hand toward them.

Bufe, who had remounted and had started back toward the horse gate, understood at a glance. The pursued man was Andy Fanshaw. Plainly he had overbet himself on the bulldogging and now was trying to run away from the winners. Welching on his wagers. Moreover, he was armed and desperate enough to shoot.

Giving his loping horse the steel, Bufe flashed across the arena to intercept Fanshaw. That gambler had turned in his panic flight to wave his automatic at the bettors who were following doggedly, when Bufe suddenly dashed across his path. With the same sureness which had marked his bulldogging, Bufe snatched down at Fanshaw's gun hand, seized the wrist and twisted it. That twist forced Fanshaw to open his hand, and with a cry of pain, he dropped the weapon to the ground.

In another instant Bufe had dragged the man up before him, throwing him across the horse as he would a sack of grain. Then, putting steel to his horse's flanks, the bulldogger galloped off to the gate, where a group of cowboys surrounded Fanshaw until he could be turned over to the officers for protection or arrest.

Among the first to rush up with congratulations was Jessie, smiling proudly. She ignored Bufe's stiff, standoffish pose as she pressed close to him and hugged his arm excitedly. "Bufe, you were great," she declared, while her eyes held a look which any man would wish to have turned his way. "And you won."

"Yes, ma'am, I won," admitted Bufe, dazed by her warmth.

"Don't be so haughty about it," she chided. "I did, too."

"Yes, ma'am—Jess," assured Bufe. "I know yo' taken day money yesterday fo' the trick riding."

"I don't mean that," she cried. "This Fanshaw—"

"Shore seemed powerful int'rested in him."

"You goose," she scolded affectionately. "Oh, Bufe, I know you'll give me the haughty eyebrow after what I said about your gambling. I took him at two to one on the bulldogging, and put up all my day money. I made him put up the money with Major Gavitt, so his welching doesn't count."

"Yo' bet—on me?" gasped Bufe.

"I *won* on you," corrected Jessie. "My first and last bet. We need all the money we can raise now to get—started on. Don't we?"

MANACLED MILLIONS By William H. Hamby

Author of "The Mayor of Black Butte," etc.

A Romance of Utah Copper

Part II

With murder as his bludgeon, the unscrupulous Blucker openly drives into the ranks of the defenders of the Paloma silver mine—and menaces the still greater project that mine represents.

CHAPTER XI

A $50,000 GAMBLE

LAFE sat in front of the door of his tent and watched the shadows thicken in the gulch below. Since Tennessee Nan's warning three weeks ago he had practically lived at the mine. They had erected a tent near the mouth of the tunnel, and Lafe had been on guard practically day and night.

Three or four moves had been made the last two weeks by Muck and his gang which indicated to Lafe that they meant to put Pedro out of the way at any cost. Twice Pedro had been involved in quarrels with men in the mine; with Carlos once, and with some new men another time. Luckily Lafe had been in reach each time and prevented Pedro from doing violence.

"Be careful, my friend," he had warned, "they are only waiting a chance to get you into the clutches of the law."

He was waiting uneasily now for Pedro's return from town. He had gone down to Bingham in the early afternoon with a heavy black grip which Lafe guessed was loaded with gold and currency. He had an idea that the Mexican, mistrusting banks, kept practically all the returns from the mine hid somewhere about his house. How much he was worth no one knew—no one, unless it was Maria.

During these three weeks since his interview with Joshua Waters, Lafe had been studying intensively the problems of copper. The deeper he went into it, the more firmly convinced he was that Mount Soledad really meant a gigantic fortune to the first man or men who unlocked that grip of porphyry rock on the bronze metal. He had convinced himself completely that this new company proposed by Steve Johns and Jerrold Dever offered a fairly good chance for immense success. He had outlined it to Pedro. They had talked it over many times; and Pedro had caught Lafe's enthusiasm. Lafe had not urged the partnership on him. But he hoped heartily that Pedro would go in and put up the money, though he wanted it done by Mascajon's own will. Lafe even hoped that Pedro had gone to town today to put money in the bank for the proposed company.

The dusk was almost black now in the bottom of the gulch. Lafe straightened in the camp chair and made a motion toward the gun at his hip—a motion that had become almost instinctive these last few weeks. A man was coming up from the gulch, and it was not Pedro. The figure was too slender, and walked too slowly for Pedro.

"Amos!" Lafe exclaimed, jumping up and going to meet the youth. "What are you doing here?" It was the first time the boy had been up to the mines since he was hurt.

"Come back to work," Amos smiled bravely as he shook Lafe's hand.

"But I told you to go home with your sister," Jason said severely.

"I don't always mind," grinned the youth. "I told Miriam if she didn't go back and let me alone, I'd run away and go to Arizona."

"Sit down." The boy was still thin and weak from his hurts, and Lafe was troubled. "But, Amos," and he frowned into the dusk, "you can't work here—it's dangerous."

"I've already got my job back," Amos replied proudly. "And if you don't want me staying up here, I can stay in town."

Lafe's hand strayed to the lad's shoulder. "Of course I want you, kid. It's just that things are getting a bit thick up here. But go in and go to bed. We'll talk it over tomorrow."

But Amos did not go to bed. Instead he came out of the tent with a camp chair and put it down beside Jason's. "I don't feel sleepy," he said apologetically, "I'll go directly, though."

Lafe guessed the boy felt lonesome and a little uneasy, and did not insist on his going in. Deep darkness filled the gulch below, though around them the sprinkled starlight made shapes visible.

"I wish Pedro would come," Lafe said aloud.

"He was going into the bank when I saw him," remarked the Mormon youth.

"Then he did go for the draft. That is good news. We are organizing a company—and Pedro is to put in the money. I'll give you a job down there when we get started, Amos."

"Thanks." There were several moments of silence. And then, "A fellow doesn't hardly know what to do, does he?" Amos remarked. "Sis was all broke up because I wouldn't go back with her to Joseph Center. I hated not to, but I tell you, Lafe, I just couldn't stand it to go back to that little old burg. It's dead—why it's as dead as a last year's ball game."

Lafe laughed. "I guess you ought to have gone, Amos, but I'm glad to have you with me. I wish Pedro would come. I hope nothing has happened to him. He's coming now!" Lafe leaned his head forward listening. "Didn't you hear steps down there?"

"Yes," answered Amos. "There's several of them."

Lafe made an uneasy gesture toward his hip pocket. Three—four—five shapes took form in the dim light—moving up the side of the gulch.

"You better go in," Lafe spoke low.

"I should say *not*," Amos replied emphatically.

The men had come much nearer now, were in speaking distance. They were Mexicans—miners who worked in the Paloma. Lafe recognized the two in the lead as Carlos and Diego.

"*Donde esta Pedro?*" asked Carlos.

Lafe had picked up a little Spanish, and guessed they were asking for Pedro.

MANACLED MILLIONS

WILLIAM H. HAMBY

Synopsis of Previous Chapters

To the mining town of Bingham, in the valley of the Great Salt Lake, young Lafe Jason comes from the Ozarks, looking for a job. He gets one with the Mexican, Pedro Mascajon, who is operating the Paloma silver mine.

A powerful mining man of Bingham, named Blucker, sends his henchman, Muck, a deputy sheriff, to spy out the value of Pedro's mine, and Lafe is able cleverly to prevent Muck's learning anything, thus earning Blucker's deadly enmity.

At the Paloma mine Lafe meets young Amos Tilbury and his sister Miriam, whose father, a Mormon, is an inventor.

Lafe, who shares a room with Amos, finds him badly beaten up, one night, by some thugs of Blucker's who had plainly mistaken Amos for Lafe. Blucker intends to get the Paloma mine, even if he has to kill both Pedro and Lafe. But Blucker's main ambition is to get Soledad Mountain. If a cheap enough process of working its low grade copper ore be found, it would be a bonanza.

"I don't know," he said, "what do you want?" Diego, he knew, understood English.

"We want money," answered Diego. "He no pay us."

"He has paid you." Lafe still kept his chair, but his right hand was close to the butt of his gun. "I paid you myself last Saturday."

"No—but not enough."

"You can see Pedro tomorrow." Lafe kept a friendly tone. He had a feeling these fellows had come for trouble, and he must sidestep if possible.

"No, no! Tonight." The others rumbled their insistence behind Diego.

"Can't see him tonight," Lafe said with finality. "He is not here."

They consulted among themselves in rapid, excitable Spanish. Diego gestured toward the cabin, and they started for Pedro's house.

"They think I am lying," Lafe said to Amos. "I hope they don't scare poor Maria."

The door to the cabin was open, and the five Mexicans stood in a little knot in front of it. Lafe saw a patch of white, and knew Maria was in the doorway.

There was rapid fire Spanish. One of the Mexicans made a grab for Maria, but she started back. Lafe started almost in a run for the cabin. Without a word he stepped between the knot of Mexicans and the open door. He could hear Maria gasping with a mixture of fear and righteous wrath.

"Diego," he said, commandingly, "I told you Pedro was not here. Go on about your business and come back tomorrow, and talk to Pedro himself."

Diego uttered a foul name in Spanish. With a force and swiftness he did not know he possessed, Lafe swung his right arm, and throwing his whole weight back of it, struck Diego on the rim of his jaw. The Mexican lit on his shoulders, almost turning a somersault, and rolled twenty feet down the slope. Lafe's right had come back from contact with Diego's jaw, and snatched the gun from his hip pocket. He had the other four covered before they had time to collect their dazed wits.

"Vamose!" he ordered savagely.

They scattered down the slope almost in a run.

Maria had come from the door. She moved up to Lafe and let her hand rest for a moment on his arm, looking up at him with her bright old eyes.

"Buen chico!" she said softly. And Lafe knew it to mean "Good lad!" from her very tone and look.

"Maria," he said gently, coloring and giving her hand a pat, "you better keep your door locked. They may come back." Then he took Amos, who had followed him to the cabin, back to his tent, and ordered him to bed; after which he sat out in front alone until nearly midnight. At last he saw Pedro coming up the side of the canyon. Lafe called him, and he came up to the tent.

"Weren't you attacked on the way from town?" Jason asked.

"Me? No!"

Lafe told him what had happened. "They may come back tomorrow, or tomorrow night," he warned. "It is a plot of some kind. Somebody—I guess it is that damn' Blucker—is trying to get you into a fight—to get you killed."

"But I will keel them," Pedro swaggered confidently.

"That will serve them as well, for then they will hang you."

"I got the money for our company." Pedro had been drinking. But he was never quite drunk. Lafe guessed he and Steve Johns and Jerry Dever had been celebrating at Glick's.

"Did you give the money to Johns?" Lafe asked.

"No." He tapped his waist around which was tied that gorgeous red sash. "Eet ees here, a check from the bank, all ready for you."

"Now listen, Pedro," Lafe's mind jumped back to the danger ahead of them. "This is great news, for I really believe that we can make a fortune out of Mount Soledad. But all depends upon our staying alive—and out of jail. How are we going to do it? I guess I better go to town in the morning and try to discover what is back of this plot—and see what help we can get."

"Si, si! Go ahead," said Pedro, and swaggered off to his cabin.

Chapter XII

Flight

BLACK CARLOS, Diego and the three other Mexicans who had made trouble, showed up next morning as though nothing had happened. The work went on as usual, but

all day Jason felt something ominous hanging over the camp. He wished he was well out of it.

At last it came quitting time. The day had seemed endless to Jason, and he stood near the mouth of the tunnel with Amos at his side, checking out the miners.

Pedro joined them. The miners were all gone.

"The damn' cowards," Pedro shrugged, "they do not cheep when the boss is here." He swelled his huge chest and hardened the muscles of his big arm. "I go down and feex that truck."

Lafe glanced down the side of the gulch. It was clear. The miners had gone on down the road toward Bingham. "I'll go down and help him," he said to Amos, "as soon as I show you how to check up these timekeeper's sheets."

Lafe spent a quarter of an hour explaining the system to him. From the door of his tent, he could hear the thump of Pedro's hammer as he repaired the ore bed of the crippled truck.

He left Amos working at the timekeeper's books and went down the side of the gulch, following the left side of the chute. Thirty yards above the big hopper that caught the ore, Lafe stopped and crossed under the chute to the right hand side. The crippled truck was just below him. Pedro was leaning over, fixing a bolt. Lafe gave a gasp at what he saw. Diego had Pedro's back covered with a gun, while Black Carlos slipped up on him with a long knife.

Instinct acted quicker than brain. A cry of warning would have sent a bullet into Pedro. Instead, Lafe snatched his own gun, and fired at Diego.

The unexpected crack of the gun made Black Carlos jump back. Pedro whirled quick as a panther, and saw the uplifted knife. Pedro shot from the hip and Black Carlos crumpled into a heap of quivering flesh. Lafe's shot had shattered Diego's shoulder, and he was groveling on the ground.

Pedro drew his gun from the holster and deliberately took aim.

"No, no!" shouted Lafe.

Pedro looked up as Lafe bounded down on him, and understood what had happened. "Señor, you have saved my life, but why spare this devil?"

"As a witness." Lafe caught hold of Pedro's arm, and forcibly lowered the gun. "Don't you see, the men who are trying to get us will have us arrested for this. We must have a witness." He walked up to Diego who squirmed in pain and terror. "Get up!" He pushed him with his foot.

"Now, talk," Lafe ordered. "Unless you talk quick and talk straight, Pedro will kill you in two minutes. "Who hired you to do this?"

"Muck." The terrified Mexican did not hesitate a second. "Spare me! I tell all. I have a wife and three leetle children. For the love of God, do not kill me!"

"What was Muck to give you?"

"One thousand dollars apiece if we kill Pedro, and two thousand if we kill you, too."

"Will you swear this in court if we let you go?"

"*Si, si.* I swear."

"Can you walk?" asked Lafe.

"*Si, si.*"

"Then go to a doctor. I'll see you tomorrow. Get what you need."

Lafe turned to Pedro and gripped his arm.

"Come on up to the house—and get ready."

"Ready for what?"

"To go to town and give ourselves up. This is a plant. They will have us arrested soon, and it will be better for us to report voluntarily."

"Ver' well," said Pedro. "You save my life, I do as you say."

While Pedro went to the house to change his clothes, Lafe stood in the door of the tent. He was shaken by the swift tragedy of events.

"It is going to ruin everything," he said to Amos, trembling beside him. "It means they will railroad Pedro to the penitentiary—and me, too, if they can."

Pedro emerged in a few minutes resplendent in the twilight, with his silk shirt and red sash and highly ornamented sombrero. "Let us go," he said lightly.

But Lafe had been looking down into the murky dusk at the bottom of the gulch. "It is not necessary." His tone was flat and fatalistic. "They are already coming for us." Five men had emerged from the dusk, and were climbing up the side of the gulch. Nevada Muck was in the lead.

"Sh-h!" Lafe's fingers clutched Pedro's arm as he made a gesture toward his gun. "They are officers of the law; we must not resist them."

"Hello, what's all the trouble?" Muck had halted his posse twenty steps from the three men.

"Is there trouble?" asked Lafe coolly.

"I heard," answered Muck, "there was a man killed up here."

"News travels fast." Lafe spoke ironically. "You must have a wireless, sheriff. A man was killed—*the wrong man for you!* It hasn't been twenty minutes. Where were you waiting?"

Muck advanced belligerently but warily, his posse following at his heels. He came within reach of Lafe. "See here," his tone was nasty, "I've taken about all the back talk from you that I'll stand from any damned guy. I put the whole bunch of you under arrest for murder!"

"Not the whole bunch," said Lafe, "this boy was up here at the tent and had nothing to do with it."

"Shut your damned mouth," Muck reached over and struck Lafe on the side of the head with his palm open. All the firmament glistened with bright red spots, but with a supreme effort, Lafe held himself in check.

"Oh, Lafe," Amos spoke up, "do you think this fellow is really an officer?" He pointed to Muck. "I saw him and two men hiding down there in the gulch about an hour ago."

"You damned liar!" Muck drew back his huge arm swiftly, and swifter than lightning a thought flashed through Lafe's mind—a thought in words, *"If he hits the boy, I'll kill him!"* The big fist struck Amos in the face, he fell heavily and his head struck a rock with a thud.

Lafe's gun leaped out, and he fired three times pointblank. The huge bulk of the deputy collapsed in a twitching mass. Two of the deputies made a pass with their guns, but Pedro shot from his hip, and both fell in their tracks. The other two ran.

For a moment Lafe stood in a sort of stupor, holding the still smoking gun in his hand. But he saw that that minute of madness was the end of everything.

"It's all up," he said to Pedro, fatalistically. "They'll hang us sure, now. Our only chance is to get away." Lafe turned to Amos who still lay with his head against the rock, where he had fallen under Muck's vicious blow. The boy was stirring. "Amos!" Lafe took him by the shoulder anxiously. "Are you all right?"

"I think so," the boy answered weakly.

"Can you stand up?"

"I'll try." Lafe helped him to his feet.

"I've got to get him away from here," said Lafe, with his arm about the youth. "They'll be back in an hour, a regular mob of hell-hounds. They'll hang all of us for shooting officers."

"Up the gulch," and Pedro pointed, "ees an old mine—with miles or more of tunnels. Hide there. Me, I get away."

Lafe started with Amos in the direction of the old shaft.

"Here—" Pedro came running after him—"keep these." He thrust a long envelope into Lafe's hands. "I go back to Mexico for a while. We get good start before they come! I send for poor old Maria when I can!"

"Pedro—!" Lafe listened—"they are coming now. They didn't have far to go for help. Run, Pedro. You'll fare worse at their hands than we will."

And then with a desperate clutch of fear, he picked up the hurt boy, threw him across his shoulder and ran for the empty tunnel.

CHAPTER XIII

THE UNEXPECTED VISITOR

MIRIAM TILBURY had lived all her life on the little farm at Joseph Center in Provo Canyon. Only once, since she had been grown, had she gone to Salt Lake City, and only once been on a railroad train—and that on a short trip from Salt Lake to Ogden.

All she knew of the world, she had learned from her father. He was an Englishman, mixed with Scotch and Irish, the son of a coal miner. He had a touch of talent, if not genius, that had cropped out in several ways. As a young man he had sung about the public houses with such success that he was given an engagement as a music hall singer. He had little education and no musical training, but he also could take the violin and play almost any piece of music he heard.

There was a streak of the mystic in

him, too, and a Mormon missionary had found him an eager listener to the story of the miraculous tablets of gold, and the founding of the Church of the Latter Day Saints by Joseph Smith. The story of the early struggle and persecutions of the Church, of the flight of the faithful away from Missouri; their long, bitter march over the mountains under the leadership of Brigham Young to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, not only stirred the fervid imagination of the young music hall singer, but aroused in him a strong partisanship for this persecuted people. He became an ardent convert, and made the trip to America and joined the Salt Lake Tabernacle. He was assigned a piece of land in Provo Canyon, and one after another, he married six wives. There was a separate house, and a separate piece of land for each.

The sixth and last wife was, in a way, different from any of the rest. Elisha Tilbury, now nearly forty years old, at the height of his physical power, still possessed of flashes of genius, still a singer that would make any audience sit forward and listen, still a player on the violin, met Miriam's mother, the youngest daughter of Joshua Waters. She was eighteen at the time, slender, beautiful, wistful for perfection, eager for life. The black hair of Elisha Tilbury, tinged with gray, his gray eyes that sometimes flashed with what seemed real inspiration, his experience in life, fascinated and won her. She could not, in words, object to his other wives; though in her heart she did. Yet, she married him. A year later Miriam was born.

Elisha showed great partiality to Miriam and her mother, spending almost half his time with them, and dividing the rest among his other families. While there was no recrimination, no open outbreaks of jealousy, there was not much life in common between Miriam's mother and the other wives. They rarely visited back and forth, and Miriam looked upon the half-brothers and sisters that lived in the other houses merely as neighboring children to be liked or disliked on their own merits.

But when Amos, her own brother arrived, everything was different. She was four years old then, and the baby became almost as much her care as her mother's. She tended him and watched over him, and guarded him with a fierce love mingled with loneliness and motherliness.

When the Federal Courts had ordered the Mormons to abandon polygamy, even though consummated marriages were allowed to stand, the new conditions gave Elisha an excuse for virtually giving all his society to his last and best loved family. But this sixth household of Elisha's lived in far from luxurious circumstances. The house was a three room, brick house, uncarpeted, plainly furnished, with beds, chairs and stoves. Their living was from what they raised—plenty of food and sufficient warmth, but that was all. Elisha's other houses and holdings had their own households to harbor and care for.

Miriam's mother tended the yard and garden; and it was a yard of flowers and shrubs and trees that caught the eye of every passer on the road up the canyon. Since Miriam was eighteen her father, who had long dabbled in inventions, had given himself over to it, and had left the tending of the little farm to her and Amos. The brother had rebelled against this, especially as their poverty pressed most heavily on him and his sister. Other families had gone forward, getting more land and cattle; and some of them had made money in timber and water rights and mines.

Outside, the village with its quiet street and tabernacle was as placid and religious and contented as it had been forty years ago. But the unrest in the very air stirred in the hearts of its young people, and many rebellions were noted. Some threw over their faith and joined the Gentiles. Some went away to Salt Lake City; others merely lingered, with smoldering discontent in their hearts.

Miriam had felt this stirring. Of all the young people in the village she probably thought most and said the least. She read books of every sort. Yet she did not talk any of this with other young people, except with Amos—and then very guardedly, for she wanted him to remain unshaken in the faith and traditions of her parents. And Amos had withheld his own turbulent thoughts from Miriam for the same reason.

It had been a shock to her and to the mother when Amos had announced his intentions of going to Bingham to get work in the mines. And no persuasion

could change his determination. After he had been gone three or four weeks, and her mother, uneasy to the point of breaking, had suggested Miriam go to Bingham and see how he fared, she had made the trip with outward calm, but great inward stirrings.

The terrific bombardment of the blasts, the roar of the mills, the open drinking places, the rough miners with their noisy oaths—the whole mining town had been to her like something from a book. And to the horror of her conscientious soul she had been fascinated by it!

After she had returned from that first visit, Joseph Center had seemed so still, so lifeless, so dull that it multiplied the hours in the day from twelve to twelve hundred.

Then the call came for her to return to Bingham. The two weeks of housekeeping for Amos and the young Gentile Lafe Jason brought her new and complex emotions which she made no effort to analyze.

But at last Amos was well, and there was no excuse for her staying longer. She tried hard to persuade him to go back with her, but he would not. Disturbed, uneasy, she returned alone to the little brick house with its garden and orchard at Joseph Center. She had been restless to the point of distraction. Her father was away up in the mountains, tinkering alone with his inventions. Her mother, content with her religious resignations, seemed to think all was well.

Miriam's one excitement of the day was to watch when the rural mail carrier passed, and hurry down to the box by the road, always hoping there might come a letter from Bingham, from Amos—or maybe from Lafe Jason! But no letter came.

One afternoon, a sweet, still afternoon when peace thickly brooded over the valley, Miriam, bareheaded, wearing a white apron over a neat gingham dress, went out to the road for the mail.

A car was coming up the long, winding road. She had seen that car before—and the man. They had been pointed out to her several times in Bingham. It was Adolph Blucker, superintendent of the big Pinto mine.

She wondered what he was doing up here, and she stood by the mailbox pretending to peruse the mail, until the big roadster should pass.

The car drew up and stopped. Blucker got out. "Are you Miss Tilbury?" He lifted his hat.

"Yes." She was surprised, scared.

"I suppose you have heard," he came up close to her and his muddy eyes were looking her over, while his voice was lowered to a tone of sympathy.

"Heard what?" Her eyes opened with fright.

"That your brother is dead."

She stood looking out across the fields. The world seemed to have stopped. Everything stood still. She saw the sunshine, and the trees, and the workmen in the fields as though in a far-off trance.

Amos dead!

Blucker took a paper from his pocket, a Salt Lake City morning paper. "The poor chap got in with a bad gang," Blucker was explaining. "Pedro Mascajon and that fellow Jason. They killed two miners and when the officers went to arrest them, they resisted arrest and shot three of the deputies. They tried to get away. Your brother foolishly stuck to Jason. They hid in an old abandoned mine. The whole country has been excited over the chase for days. A posse of a hundred or more men besieged the mine. The Mexican or Jason, we don't know which, shot two more men from the tunnel. The officers were not willing to take any more risks. They filled the mine full of poison gas——"

Blucker caught the girl as she fell in a dead faint, and started with her toward the house. As she lay limp in his arms, he looked down on her hair—soft, thick, dark hair. And the smooth health of her skin, her lips and the fineness of her body affected him as these beauties in no other woman ever had.

Mrs. Tilbury, puttering in her garden, saw a strange man carrying Miriam toward the house. She gave a cry, and ran to meet him, the weeding fork still in her hand.

"She's only fainted," Blucker said.

The mother led the way flutteringly into the house, and Blucker laid the girl on the bed in her room. The mother hastily unfastened the waist at Miriam's neck, and lowered her head.

"She will come to directly," Blucker reassured the mother. "I brought bad news, and I guess I broke it to her too suddenly."

"Bad news?" Mrs. Tilbury turned a stricken face upon the man. "Is—is—it Amos?"

Blucker nodded.

"He is not—dead?"

Again the brief nod.

And that face, old too soon, but yet wearing traces of beauty because of the mother light in it, went suddenly desolate. Her hands knotted together and a single cry escaped her lips as she dropped on her knees beside Miriam's bed.

Blucker left them, went out into the other room and sat down in a hickory rocking chair. He looked casually about at the pictures on the walls; an enlarged photograph of a man with bushy black hair. "Tilbury," thought Blucker; an etherealized picture of Joseph Smith receiving a message from the angel Maroni, a lithograph of the beautiful Salt Lake temple. "Mormons, all right," he nodded.

Blucker got up and walked out into the yard. There were perhaps ten acres in the little farm—fruit trees, garden, and a patch of corn and another of alfalfa. There were no other houses nearer than a quarter of a mile. It was so still one could hear the bees buzzing over ripe apples in the orchard.

He went back into the house. The two women came out of the bedroom, their eyes dried.

"Tell us about it," said the mother, and with a heroic braveness she met Blucker's eyes. And Blucker retold his tale.

"The body?" It was all the mother could say, at the end.

"They can't go in after them for two days yet—have to wait for the gas to clear out."

"You go for your father," Mrs. Tilbury said to Miriam. Then, as the girl left, Mrs. Tilbury turned to Blucker and said, "Did they blame—Amos? Was he accused?"

Blucker shook his head. "No, he is not even mentioned. They knew one of the miners was with Jason, but I think I am the only one who knew he was your son. And I did not know until after the tragedy. You know who I am?"

She nodded slowly. "You are Adolph Blucker."

"Do you want me to go to your husband and tell him about this sad affair?"

"No." She shook her head resolutely. "But if you will be so kind, when my husband comes, you may take him and me back with you to get poor Amos."

"Certainly, I'll be glad to take all of you. There is room in the car."

"I don't want Miriam to go. I'm afraid she could not stand it."

AT SUNDOWN Miriam was in the orchard. She could not stay in the house alone. Everything about it reminded her of Amos. But Miriam was calm now—a still, brooding calmness that ached and ached. The sun was gone in the valley. It would be dark directly and she must go in. She wished her mother had let her go with them. This loneliness was terrible.

Lafe Jason had died, too. Lafe Jason who had caused the death of her brother. If Amos had never met Jason, he would be alive now, and well. She hated Jason. She hated him worse than the devil in the bottomless pit!

She was crying when she went into the house, but she did not know it until she felt her cheeks wet. It was dark inside, but she did not light a lamp. She sat by the window of the dark house and looked out at the stars, and tried to think how much better off Amos was, away up there in heaven where it was safe and beautiful.

But it wouldn't do. "I don't know he is up there. I don't even know there is a heaven!" It was a bitter cry that spoke itself aloud.

There was a noise outside the house, in front, near the door—the sound of footsteps. It could not be. No one ever came at this time of night. She had turned her head toward the door. It was so dark she could not see the chair. The wind whined and then was silent. Her heart beat suffocatingly.

A knock at the door—once, twice, three times—low—and then as though something fell against it.

She lighted the lamp and stood trembling before the door. "Who is it?" No answer. Again she called, but still no answer.

She unlocked the door, and opened it slowly. A man leaning against the door pitched forward and fell inside.

It was Lafe Jason.

CHAPTER XIV

MOCKING MONEY

MIRIAM stepped back, her lips parted; she gasped strangelingly in her throat. Lafe raised himself to a sitting posture. His clothes were torn, his eyes sunken and hollow, his face ashen.

"He's over yonder." He spoke hoarsely. "In the bushes beyond the road. I couldn't carry him farther."

"Who?" Miriam went down on her knees.

Lafe swallowed. His throat was swollen and he seemed in a daze. "Amos." His lips barely formed the word.

"Is he dead?"

Lafe shook his head weakly. "Very sick—couldn't carry him any farther."

Miriam got to her feet at one leap. "Come on!"

Lafe tried to rise, but fell back on the floor. "Weak," he said slowly, "damn' weak. Nothing to eat—two days."

She ran to the kitchen and got milk. He drank it avidly. In a few minutes he struggled to his feet. His mind cleared. "Get a strong blanket. We can carry him, together."

Lafe's step at first was faltering, but he gained strength as they went. He led Miriam to a clump of willow bushes near the river beyond the road. "There," he said, pointing ahead.

She darted in, and was on her knees by Amos, running her hands over his face and neck.

"Quick," she called to Lafe, who came into the brush more slowly. "He's got a fever—an awful fever."

They made a stretcher of the blanket and between them got him to the house, and laid him on Miriam's bed. She got off his outer clothes and bathed his hot face in cold water. Lafe sat in a chair beside the bed, exhausted.

"He's very sick," repeated Miriam, touching the feverish forehead again.

"It's his head," said Lafe dully. "That damned Muck struck him—his head hit a rock. We hid in the mountains the first night——"

"In the old mine?"

"No," he shook his head weakly. "Didn't get to the old mine—posse too close. Hid behind some rocks all night."

"And how did you get him here?"

"Carried him," he said simply.

"Did Amos shoot any of the officers?"

"No."

"Did you?"

"One—Muck."

Miriam went to the kitchen for more cold water. When she returned, Lafe had slipped from the chair and lay on the floor. She bent over him. He was breathing heavily.

"Asleep!" she said. "And I have got to get a doctor for Amos."

She stood thinking for a brief moment. Amos, so Blucker said, was not accused, but Jason was. She set down the pan and caught Lafe under the arms and dragged him into the other bedroom. Leaving him on the floor she started away, but turned back and took a pillow from the bed and placed it under his head. Then she shut and locked the door, and hurried out toward the village of Joseph Center for a doctor.

The doctor shook his head ominously over the sick boy. "A bad lick on the back of the head, and a shock to his whole system. Not strong anyway."

After the doctor was gone, Miriam sat by the bed, crying softly an dcaressing the hand that lay outside the cover. Amos stirred, and began talking in his delirium. He cried out in fear, and again and again implored Lafe to do something. At first it was not clear what he wanted Lafe to do, but at last Miriam understood.

It was three o'clock when the lad began to sink into a stupor. Miriam, frightened, went into the other room and shook Lafe. He roused out of a deep sleep with a sudden wrench as though he had still set a watch upon himself.

"Is he worse?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes. Come quick; I'm scared."

Only once had Lafe watched the final passing of life from the human clay. But he knew the moment he entered the room that Amos was dying.

He stood looking down at the boy as the breath came slower and slower, his chest rising and falling as though the waves rolled back with slow, hopeless wash as the tide ebbed farther and farther from the shore.

Miriam was crouched at the bedside, silently clinging to the boy's chilling hands. At last she stood up. It was all over. She stood looking down at the face on the pillow. The house was very still.

"Come." Lafe touched her arm. She followed him from the room.

He was tremendously moved. He had loved Amos and his grief was real. The house seemed to oppress him. "Let's go outside." He led her, unresisting, out into the yard. The trees in the orchard, buildings, the distant mountains, were dimly outlined in the starlight.

"You must go." She turned to him. "They will arrest you if they find you here."

"But you are alone."

"I will call help."

"But I don't know where to go." His voice was tired.

"Father has a cabin and a workshop in the mountains, six miles up the canyon to the northwest. No one goes by there for days at a time. He works alone there. He's away from it now. Go up there." She told him how to find the place.

"I suppose," he said, slowly, "you hate me because of what has happened to Amos."

She turned away from him, looked up toward the stars, and made no reply.

"Do you believe," he said, his own heart aching for comfort, "that he is up there among the stars?"

"Yes," her voice was low and hushed.

"I don't." It was an outcry for proof rather than a negation; but she turned on him an impromptu fierceness.

"Go! Go, and never come back! You have killed him, and now you are trying to kill my faith."

Without another word he left her standing there, and made his way up the canyon toward her father's mountain cabin. But, in spite of everything, one bit of grim satisfaction stirred deep in his conscience. He had brought Amos home. It had been hard almost beyond endurance—hiding, dodging, and always carrying the sick lad on his shoulders or in his arms—three days, interminable days of staggering across the mountains.

Lafe found Tilbury's cabin, up the canyon, without difficulty. The door was unlocked. He went in and stumbled about until he found a bed, dropped onto it and directly was fast asleep. It was near noon when he awoke, clawingly hungry. He found food and cooked himself a hearty meal on the inventor's stove.

Back of the cabin was a much larger building, the workshop of the Mormon inventor. It was locked, and Lafe made no effort to see what was in it.

He would have to stay inside, and looked around for something to read; there was nothing, and he sat down by an open window. He remembered then for the first time the envelope Pedro gave him that night of their flight. He wondered if he still had it; got up and searched, took his coat from the chair-back. Yes, it was in the inside pocket.

The envelope was sealed. He tore off the end of it, and drew out a letter, and a bank draft. The draft was for $50,000 and was made out to him, Lafe Jason!

The letter from the cashier of the bank said that according to instructions from Pedro Mascajon they were handing him a draft for $50,000 to be used in the Mount Soledad Company. Also, that Pedro Mascajon had executed and left with them a transfer of his lease on the La Paloma, to Lafe Jason, with instructions that if anything happened to him, Lafe was to manage the mine and keep the proceeds in trust for Pedro Mascajon until he should return, or for a period of ten years. For which services, he was to have one-third of the profits.

Lafe folded the papers and put them back in his pocket. What irony! Fifty thousand dollars, and the management of the La Paloma thrust upon him, and he a fugitive with a charge of murder upon his head.

And his best friend was dead—and Miriam hated him!

Chapter XV

FREED!

IT WAS the third day Lafe had been in hiding, and his restlessness was becoming unendurable. Standing by the open east window he saw a man coming up the canyon, the first human being he had seen in three days. The man was bareheaded and walked as though tired or in a very deep study.

"That," thought Lafe, "must be Elisha Tilbury."

The man approached but turned aside, passed around the cabin and unlocked the door of the workshop. He was a man of striking appearance with his bushy iron gray hair, white beard, broad shoulders and strong neck.

Tilbury closed the workshop door be-

hind him, and in a little while Lafe heard the sound of a hammer on steel. What a strange man, thought Lafe. A Mormon and an inventor. A man with six families that he allowed to struggle for themselves, while he buried himself in this still canyon to work out queer inventions. Had Miriam told her father that he was here? He dreaded to meet him, but it had to be done. He went outside, opened the workshop door, and entered.

There was a blacksmith's furnace with charcoal and a bellows. The charcoal glowed hotly, and Elisha Tilbury was skilfully curving a small red hot disc with a light hammer. Lafe stood by without speaking, but Tilbury did not glance up until the metal had cooled too hard to bend. Then he turned casually toward Lafe and looked at him long and searchingly.

Lafe met the look. Tilbury's face was even more remarkable than his body. His eyes were the restless, changing eyes of poet or inventor, his face, rough and seamed, his mouth strongly sensual. But there was in the spirit of the man something understandable and likeable.

"Has anyone seen you here?" Tilbury spoke first.

"No." Lafe waited for a further lead.

Tilbury glanced significantly toward the door. "Wait for me in the cabin. I'll be out in an hour—want to finish this thing."

It was near noon and Lafe set the table for two and prepared dinner. Tilbury came in, washed his hands, and sat down without a word. His mind still seemed far off, either with the problem of the inventor or with his lost son, his best beloved son.

They were half through the meal before Tilbury spoke. Looking up as he set down his coffee cup, he asked abruptly, "Know anything about metals?"

"I was in a mining school for nearly two years," Lafe replied.

"Then maybe you can help me."

Lafe followed him into the workshop after dinner. Tilbury explained the invention upon which he was working. It was a new type of electric lamp, a lamp that would generate its own electricity and yet a lamp without wires that could be moved from room to room, a lamp that would brilliantly light the whole house, for a cost of one cent an hour.

Tilbury was no longer silent, self absorbed. His face was animated, his eyes burned brilliant, the words flowed.

"This is the greatest invention ever attempted. In the dark farmhouse shut up in the long northern winter, in the far-off jungle cabin in South America, to the dwellers in small villages—everywhere this lamp will be a great boon.

"And on the four sides of it will be a message; on one, the angel Maroni; on the second, the book of Mormon; on the third a picture of the great temple, and on the fourth the likeness of Joseph Smith. Thus every lamp will carry the message of the true faith of the Latter Day Saints of Jesus Christ."

Tilbury's lamp idea was ingenious—and almost practicable. Lafe pointed out the big difficulty.

"Yes," admitted Tilbury, "that is where I thought you might help me."

"I'll study it over," said Lafe, "but I don't think it can be done."

Tilbury had three other inventions under process of construction. One of them Lafe thought excellent. One was impossible. The other merely probable. But without question this Mormon had remarkable inventive ability. That evening after supper, the two sat in the cabin without lights and discussed inventions.

"The one that would make the most money and do the most good of all," said Lafe, "would be a process that would concentrate low grade copper ore."

He told him of Mount Soledad, of the two or three other great deposits of low grade copper in the world.

"Your lamp is a wonderful idea," Lafe said in conclusion. "But think of loosening that copper in this mountain for the world's use—for a bit of copper wire on a ship far out at sea, or making possible a wireless from an explorer deep in the jungles, or a call from an airplane or the highest mountain, or a voice from a caravan in the wildest of the Arabian desert! Think of the millions of wheels that turn in response to the power that flows through a copper wire—of the cars that carry messages, of the wires that carry light! If you could only invent a machine to handle that ore cheaply—the thousand tongues in that mountain would speak to all the world!"

"What is the problem?" Tilbury was

the practical one now, vastly interested.

Lafe explained the milling machinery then in use, and showed the expensiveness of putting one per cent. copper through it.

"Have you any ideas?" asked Tilbury.

"No—yes—or merely a chance suggestion." That dish of soap suds from the pan in which Miriam had washed his gloves still stuck in Lafe's mind—the dish of soapy water in which he had recognized copper. And he told Tilbury about it. "The sight of that copper in that water proves to me one thing, whether it's a useful thing or not. If the ore is ground fine enough, copper particles would float on soap suds, or on bits of oil."

The thing stuck in the inventor's mind and he referred to it several times the next day, asking more questions about mining machinery and copper milling.

Lafe had been with him for three days, and only once had he referred to Amos. Lafe had told him briefly of the trouble and of their escape, and his terrible struggle to get the sick boy home.

"*I* never have blamed you for what happened." Tilbury's emphasis on "I" made Lafe wince, for it meant that the rest had—Miriam and her mother.

Under other circumstances Lafe would have enjoyed these days with the inventor. Mormon though he was, Lafe admitted he had lots of good sense and good principles, and they had many things in common; their bitter experience with poverty in early youth and their longing to escape from it were not the least of these.

But Lafe again felt time slipping by, and no solution of his problem in sight. Sooner or later he would be discovered up here, and dragged back, handcuffed, and a noose almost surely awaited his return.

About three o'clock, the third day, Lafe was in the workshop. He had been sketching a sort of box with a cradle in it—something on the order of a washing machine—in which he might try out this matter of floating copper on soap suds. Tilbury had gone into the cabin for an afternoon nap.

Lafe, sitting on the bench and bent over the drawing, heard voices. He lifted his head and listened. His heart began to thump queerly. It was Miriam's voice. Would she come out here and speak to him?

Lafe waited half an hour. The voices still ran on. Then they were silent. He almost held his breath as he listened for her footsteps. Ten minutes he waited, but she did not come. He got down from the bench tired, despondent, and went into the house. Tilbury lay on the couch. The house was empty.

There was a newspaper on the table. It had not been there this morning. She had brought it. He went to the table, and pushed the ink bottle aside; she had set that on it to keep it from blowing away. It was yesterday's copy of *The Miner*, Bingham's little daily newspaper, folded inside out as though there was some special news item she wanted him to see. There was. His eye found it quickly in the second column.

Nevada Muck, who had one of the narrowest escapes in the recent war up Devil's Gulch that a man ever had, was out in the street again yesterday for the first time since the La Paloma battle. The deputy sheriff was shot three times at close range by Pedro Mascajon's accomplice, Lafe Jason. Any of the three bullets might have proved fatal, but each unaccountably missed its vital mark, and left only flesh wounds on the hardy, and lucky, deputy sheriff.

Lafe dropped into a chair, trembling and breathing hard from sheer keenness of relief. He was not a murderer after all.

And she had brought this message!

He knew now what to do. He got up and crossed the room to Tilbury and shook him by the shoulder until he opened his eyes.

"I'm starting for Bingham."

Chapter XVI

BLUCKER DOUBTS

WHILE Bingham had been in the throes of that wild excitement following the shooting of three deputy sheriffs by the Mexican desperado, Pedro Mascajon and his American accomplice, Lafe Jason, Adolph Blucker had been the coolest man in town. He had suggested caution in the pursuit and urged that when the prisoners should be caught the law be allowed to take its course.

When hundreds of men with the queer primitive mixture of the hunter and the blood seeker, joined in the wild scouring of the canyon and mountains for the fugitives, Blucker remained in

his office unmoved by rumors of desperate battles in which dozens were killed.

But the night on which word came direct to him that the Mexican and Jason had been trapped in the old Bonanza Mine, and that three more deputies had been shot to death from the mouth of the tunnel, Adolph Blucker had personally called the sheriff and offered his assistance. The sheriff had gone immediately to the offices of the Pinto, and there Blucker had placed before him an engineer's map of the old Bonanza, showing every tunnel and off shoot.

"These men are desperate," he counseled, "and it is a useless sacrifice of life to send men into those winding tunnels."

"Then what?" questioned the sheriff.

"Poison gas."

The sheriff had accepted the suggestion, and Blucker, it developed, had a lot of poison gas on hand. His chemist had been experimenting with it.

It was then that he had driven to Joseph Center to carry the news to the Tilburys. Blucker was one of the few people who knew that Josephine Tilbury was the daughter of Joshua Waters, disinherited because of her marriage to a Mormon, and that Amos and Miriam Tilbury were the grandchildren of old Joshua. Blucker shrewdly guessed that while Waters might never forgive his daughter, there would probably come a time when the right appeal might turn his heart to the granddaughter—and Miriam would be the old man's sole heir.

Blucker, returning to Bingham with Elisha Tilbury and his wife, had a feeling of having done everything well and properly. Events had indeed been well ordered. Pedro was dead. After a lapse of three months without operation, the Mexican's lease on the La Paloma could be canceled. And Adolph Blucker had in his safe a deed to the ground on which Pedro's claim was located!

Along with Pedro had been eliminated that annoying upstart, Lafe Jason. With it all, Blucker had made a great impression on Miriam Tilbury and her father and mother.

But the manager was due for a disappointment. When the old mine was clear of poison gas, and officers had gone in, they had returned without any dead bodies. Not a trace of the Mexican or Lafe or Amos was found. This, however, the officers reassured and Blucker believed, was natural. There were so many ramifications to the mine that men might search for days and still not enter half the old tunnels. No doubt, the desperadoes were dead.

Yet Tilbury received some sort of hurried message from home, and he and his wife left at once without seeing Blucker, merely leaving a word of thanks for his kindness. He did not quite understand that.

And then, another still more secret annoyance cropped up. Nevada Muck, instead of dying from his wounds, was getting well. If a criminal is cunning, his first thought after a crime is to get rid of the tools with which it is committed. It is difficult to get rid of the human tools a man employs in unlawful ways, however. No matter how clever and strong and cautious he may be, once he uses another man to do an unlawful act, his line of defense becomes as weak as that human tool. And eventually there is usually an agent with a screw loose in his calculations, and the smooth running criminal machine rattles so that even the police hear it.

Adolph Blucker never dreamt of himself as a criminal. He had no thought of organizing a secret band of thugs and cutthroats. He considered himself a general of industry. If some of his work had to be done through a form of secret service, that was no more than any fighter had to expect. If obstacles, human and otherwise, had to be removed, that was merely the fortunes of war—and business, to Blucker, meant war. One had to fight the inefficiency, the stupidity, the sullen discontent of the laborers, one had to outwit the greed of the men who sold supplies, and above all, one had to conquer rapacious rivals who wanted the cream off the same jug of milk.

Blucker had picked on Nevada Muck to do some of the things he wanted done in the way of removing obstacles. But now when he wanted to be rid of him, Muck was getting well—and Muck would be hard to slough off. He could not fire him, for once Muck was discharged, Blucker no longer could control him. The thought that he was to some degree in Muck's power made him silently furious.

Blucker was walking the office in the dusk, the lights out, alternately scheming his next moves and cursing Nevada

Muck for getting well, when the big deputy hulked in through the door, limped to a chair and sat down.

"Well," Blucker wasted no words on congratulations on his escape from death, "you've made a damned mess of it."

"Why, it couldn't have been better!" Nevada was surprised. He had been proud of getting so many of his men killed while he escaped. "We got 'em, didn't we? And that is what I came around for. I need quite a chunk of money. Doctor's bills and so forth."

"How do you know that Mascajon is dead?" Blucker glared at him through the dusk.

"Of course he is—couldn't help it—all three of them are dead."

"I am not so sure of that." Blucker felt his doubt grow. "And what became of Diego after he was shot that first evening?"

"Disappeared. Never got a track of him since. Guess he started back to Mexico, and died somewhere on the way."

"Guess, guess!" Blucker's tone was acid. "That is all you do—guess! Like as not the whole damned crew will be walking in on us alive! Now look here," and Blucker turned on his tool savagely, "you keep your eye well peeled. If that damned Jason should show up here alive, nab him before he has time to squawk. If you don't, there's going to be hell to pay. I've got a hunch that he and Amos Tilbury got away!"

Chapter XVII

MAN WANTED

JERROLD DEVER was in Steve Johns' room going over their bad luck when Lafe entered abruptly. Steve jumped to his feet. "The devil!" he exclaimed.

"The devil and Tom Walker!" echoed Dever. "We thought you were dead. Or are you?"

"Not yet." Lafe could not restrain a grin. "I came back to give myself up."

"They will hang you," said Dever.

"Maybe," assented Lafe, "but before I am arrested I want to line up my defense. I'm not going to hang without a kick. Who is a good lawyer?"

"We'll get Bill Sample." Steve's "we" warmed Lafe's heart. "Jerry," and Steve turned to the still astonished fat young man, "go out and round up Sample and bring him here."

After Jerry was gone, Steve looked at Lafe with a long, dubious stare. "I'm glad you are alive, but sorry you came back. Five deputy sheriffs dead! They'll put up a horrible case against you."

"I didn't kill any of them," said Lafe. "Muck was the only one I shot."

"But you were in the tunnel with Pedro, and——"

"But I wasn't;" said Lafe. "I was carrying Amos over the mountains."

"Wasn't in the tunnel at all?" Steve exclaimed.

"No."

"Can you prove it?"

"I guess not." Lafe shook his head. "There was no one with me but Amos. And he's dead."

Jerry returned in about fifteen minutes with the lawyer in tow. Lafe briefly stated his part in the events that had stirred Bingham into that frenzied three day man hunt.

The lawyer frowned and tapped his knee with the knuckles of his left hand. "Ordinarily your case would offer grounds for defense, but here everything will be stacked against you. If I don't miss my guess, your return to life will be resented bitterly by Adolph Blucker and Nevada Muck."

"Not a doubt of it," assented Lafe.

"Our one hope," said the lawyer, after cogitation, "will be to prove you were never in the tunnel of the old Bonanza, and were therefore not responsible for any of the killings. What sort of a gun do you carry?"

"A thirty-eight." Lafe drew it from his pocket and passed it over to the lawyer. "I shot Muck three times. The other three cartridges are still there."

Sample examined the weapon a few minutes, and passed it back to the new client. "Keep it with you. Have it on you when you are arrested. I think we better go now and give you up."

"Not tonight," said Lafe. "I don't want to sleep in jail, and I do want to scout around a little. I'll come to your office at nine in the morning, and we'll go to the deputy sheriff's office then."

It was nine o'clock when Lafe left Steve Johns' room. He followed a back street, circled to the left, and took the road up to the La Paloma. Before being put under arrest he must learn, if possible what had become of Diego, the

Mexican he had shot in the shoulder. Diego was the one witness who could prove that Muck was not an honest official, but the instigator of all the trouble.

Devil's Gulch was silent as a deserted field as Jason slipped up the slope along the chute. He walked very cautiously, his eyes and ears alert. If the officers had any suspicion that Pedro was still alive, they might yet have a watch on his house. But nothing was moving, and apparently nothing had been disturbed. Even his tent, in which he and Amos had stayed, still stood at the left of the mine.

Lafe crept up to it, and turned back the flap at the entrance. By the dim starlight he saw it was unoccupied. He sat down on the end of his cot, rested his elbows on his knees, and looked out at the dim night world.

Life and plans and ambitions all seemed as unreal and unsubstantial as the faint shape out there under the stars. Only a few nights ago he sat there, his mind shaping great air castles of success. And Amos was with him, and woven into the dreams were flashes of color that had to do with the boy's sister.

Now Amos was dead. All their plans had gone to smash. Tomorrow he was to be arrested and almost certainly convicted of murder. And Miriam hated him.

What had he done to cause this wreck of brilliant dreams? He had been very cautious, and quite slow to resist. Only one slip, a momentary flare of wrath when that great bully had struck Amos and he had heard the boy's head crash against the rock. What a tragedy, that a quick flash of temper, the dropping of a hat or the firing of a gun could warp and twist and break a dozen well planned lives!

He stirred from his moody reflections, got up and walked outside. He was not done yet; he would not be hanged like a sheep. First, he must find someone who could tell him about Diego. He had thought it possible Maria might have remained, and that she would have some clue.

There was a light in the east window. Lafe started for the house. He knocked. There were scurrying footsteps inside, and the light was blown out.

"Maria!" he called. "Are you there, Maria?"

The door opened a crack, a cautious head appeared, then with a wide fling, the door was thrown open.

"Señor Hason!" Maria's arms were about his neck. With his arm about her, Lafe led her inside.

"Light the lamp, Maria."

She understood, and put a match to the coal oil lamp. An odd valise stood open in the middle of the floor, one side of it hastily filled with the old woman's clothing. She had been packing when he knocked. With her broken bits of English she managed to tell him that she had been staying with some friends she had made during the time she had been at Paloma with Pedro, and had just slipped back to get some things tonight. It was the first time she had returned since the killing. Was her Pedro dead? Had Lafe seen him? Had Señor Hason come from him?

Lafe shook his head sadly. He knew nothing, except that Pedro would send for her if he could, but he feared Pedro was dead. Still, they could hope. He got her to understand he was seeking Diego. Did she know anything of Diego?

She shook her head. She knew nothing of Diego, but the friends with whom she stayed might know. Lafe indicated that she was to finish packing. He would go with her to her friends. He must find Diego and scare him into telling the truth.

Maria quickly filled the suit case, and fastened the catch. Lafe picked it up, and they set forth. They followed the road toward Bingham within a quarter of a mile of the town. Then Maria pointed to an adobe house in a patch of cottonwood trees across the creek.

Maria's friends, an old Mexican couple, were greatly excited over Lafe's return. Everybody had thought he was dead along with Pedro. And the Mexicans had looked upon him as a great hero for having stood by his Mexican friend in the battle. Neither of them knew Diego personally; but the old man had seen a Mexican with his shoulder bandaged, going into an old deserted house, out beyond Mount Soledad. It might be Diego.

Could he find the place?

He shook his head. Not at night. It was a very difficult way. But Lafe knew the Mexican was merely afraid of being caught with him—and it *would* be dangerous. He asked the way, and the

exact location of the house, and thought he could find it.

He bade them good night, and started back to the road. As he approached the creek, a man stepped out from behind a tree, and shoved a gun at him. "You are under arrest."

"All right." Lafe saw the officer was shaking with fright, and knew a scared man behind a gun is very dangerous. "I came in to give myself up. Let's go."

Chapter XVIII

A VILLAIN SMILES

ADOLPH BLUCKER had four nicely furnished rooms on the third floor of the Pinto office building—living quarters for himself, and a couple of spare rooms in which to put up officials of the company who came out on inspection tours.

It was a quarter past eleven; he had been in bed an hour but had not gone to sleep. He lay on his left side, his head propped up with two pillows, looking out of the open window at Mount Soledad clearly outlined against the warm starlit sky.

The last week had been crowded full of significant events, and more good news had come to him in these few days than in twenty years before. He deserved it, of course, for he had earned fortune by careful planning and fearless execution. Whatever of good came to Blucker was purely the result of his own cleverness and hard work; whatever of ill, the result of damned stupidity and carelessness of others.

Pedro and that confounded Jason were dead, and the La Paloma silver mine would be his. It was not a big mine, but it might yield as much as half a million before the rich vein of silver ran out.

The same sweep of well ordered events which had removed the Mexican and Jason had smashed the rather puny but meddlesome project of Steve Johns and Jerry Dever to get a hold on Mount Soledad.

The way was now clear for negotiations with old Waters. It was time for him to get control of that mountain. One of his engineers had reported yesterday that *he* had solved the problems of low grade copper ore!

Blucker reached over the edge of the bed to a little stand, found matches and lit a cigarette. The trend of his thoughts changed. He was thinking of that Mormon girl over in Provo Canyon, the day she had fainted and he had carried her into the house. He wanted her—and what he wanted he intended to have. Yesterday he had made Gregory the Greek who ran the Paris Café, telephone by long distance, offering her twenty dollars a week as cashier of the café. Blucker suddenly leaped into the middle of the floor, and stood shaking for a moment before he realized it was only the sudden, loud, blatant jangle of the telephone on the table. His nerves were more on edge than he knew. He reached for the receiver and called in the transmitter roughly, "Hello." Even during the momentary wait he had a premonition.

"Hello. That you, Mr. Blucker?" It was Muck.

"Yes!"

"That damned Jason isn't dead. He came back tonight, but one of my men nabbed him before he got to town. We got him in jail now."

For an hour Blucker was busy with the telephone. He finally located Jim Mulford, the prosecuting attorney at Salt Lake City, and asked him to drive at once for Bingham. He then got Tom Graedle, the attorney for the Pinto, and his own private attorney, at the Cooper Hotel in Bingham, and ordered him to come to the office of the Pinto within the hour.

At half past two o'clock in the morning the two lawyers were in Blucker's room discussing the case. Graedle and Mulford worked together without friction, as it was on the slate that Graedle was to be the next attorney general for the State, and Mulford was to have the Pinto job.

"What the devil is the matter with you, 'Dolph?" the prosecutor rallied him, "dragging me out of bed and over forty miles of rough road on a dead easy case like this. You must have eaten something that has given you the willies."

But Blucker couldn't see any humor in it. When a man thinks he has an absolutely sure thing, and then discovers even a small slip in it, he gets suspicious of the whole case. "I don't need to beat around the bush with you boys. I want that damned Jason out of the way—

absolutely out of the way! Get that!"

"Nothing easier," said Mulford. "We can hang him higher than a sycamore limb. Didn't he and Pedro kill five officers?"

Blucker shook his head. "That is what we have to prove. The only thing we are absolutely sure of is that he shot Muck. I think you better issue a warrant on the charge of attacking an officer with a deadly weapon with the intent to kill. You can add the other charges later."

"I don't think so," said Mulford. "We better charge him with murder, and demand that he be remanded to jail without bail until district court meets."

"No," spoke up Graedle. "'Dolph is right. We better make the charge one that we know we can prove. That will insure him of being held. If we make it murder, and did not prove it, the justice might turn him loose. That, I gather, is what 'Dolph especially dislikes."

"But," said the prosecutor, "if we make it only assault his lawyer will demand that he be released on bail."

"That'll be all right," said Graedle, grinning. "Let 'em demand bail. I'll speak to the justice in the morning about the size of it." He winked knowingly.

Chapter XIX

"I'LL GO AFTER DIEGO!"

WHEN the key was turned in the lock and the jailer left, Lafe felt he had never known bitterness until then. Hour by hour he walked back and forth in that eighteen-by-ten cell. One iron barred window about eighteen inches square and eight feet from the floor let in a faint straggle of starlight.

The disgrace and humiliation of being locked in jail were far in the background now. The immediate and appalling danger of being convicted and hanged filled his mind. The court would be fixed. Adolph Blucker ruled the town. The trial would be a mere form. He would be returned to this wretched jail for two months until the district court met. There would be no chance for him to find Diego, no chance for him to gather evidence that he was not with Pedro in the tunnel where the officers were shot.

They would have witnesses who would swear he shot some of the officers. They would convict him, hang him. And now, looking up at a single star through that barred window, life was very sweet. If now, tonight, he was out on the hills, breathing the sweet fresh air of peace, all the wealth of the world could go by the board.

Daylight came at last. Sample evidently had heard, for he came to the jail a little after eight. Weary, heavy eyes, unshaven, Lafe sat gloomily on the soiled cot while the lawyer talked.

"We'll do the best we can," he said, "but don't expect too much."

"I don't expect anything," said Lafe.

"If you could have found your witness——"

"I could," interrupted Lafe, "if that deputy had not butted in."

"You suppose I could find him?"

Lafe shook his head. "No good. I'd have to scare him into testifying. If you found him, like as not he'd swear against us."

Sample arose to go. "The preliminary hearing is to be set for two o'clock this afternoon. The town is pretty wildly excited over your return." Then, as an afterthought the attorney asked, just as he was leaving, "What kind of a gun did Pedro carry?"

"A Colt forty-five," Lafe answered dully.

AT A quarter to two as Lafe went from the jail to the court room, the streets were lined on both sides five deep with people. It seemed all Bingham was out to see the returned desperado. Lafe held his head up. He was angry now, not ashamed. He had not done a thing he was sorry for. He would face the thing clear to the last jump-off without flinching.

As they passed the Paris Café his eyes caught a familiar figure in the front of watchers—Adolph Blucker. And then his heart gave a tumultuous and sickening thump, as though it had turned over completely. Standing beside Blucker was Miriam Tilbury!

Lafe's head went a little higher, his jaw set. The fingers of his manacled hands shut in a hard knot. He was done being sorry for himself. He was going to fight now, fight that devil back there, and all his minions!

The preliminary hearing was brief. The prosecuting attorney had drawn the charge as Blucker had directed. The

defendant was charged with shooting an officer with intent to kill; and Nevada Muck was named as the officer.

"Guilty or not guilty?" The justice asked in a solemn, judicial tone. The courtroom was packed to the doors and windows.

"Yes, I shot him," replied Lafe, with the first smile that had crossed his face in days, "but I'm not guilty."

"The prisoner is bound over to await trial in the criminal court," announced the justice briefly.

Sample arose and asked that a moderate bail be fixed. "There are extenuating circumstances connected with this case, your Honor."

The prosecutor was on his feet in a moment. "Your Honor," objected Mulford, "we intend later to bring in a charge of murder, and prove this defendant guilty of killing two men. We therefore ask that the heaviest bail permitted by law be set."

"Fifty thousand dollars," announced the justice, promptly. The prosecutor could not repress a grin, the spectators tittered. Sample sprang to his feet to protest.

But Lafe laid his hand on his arm and drew him down. That mention of fifty thousand had given him an inspiration and a sudden determination. The arresting officer last night in searching him had taken only his pistol and his knife.

Lafe reached into his inside coat pocket, drew out an envelope, and took from it a slip of paper, and laid it before the justice. The Court adjusted its glasses, and stared at the blue slip. The spectators craned their necks.

"What is it, your Honor?" The prosecuting attorney held out his hand.

"A certified check," replied the justice, chewing his under lip, "from the Miner's Bank to Lafe Jason, for $50,000!"

The justice glanced swiftly about the courtroom. There was more pleasure than consternation in the faces of the spectators. In fact, a distinct murmur of applause had gone around the room at the announcement. The prosecutor's eyes met the justice's, and he gave a slight nod. The thing had to be accepted, and it should be done gracefully. "Bail is accepted," announced the justice crisply, "and the prisoner released."

As they left the courtroom, Sample whispered, "Where in the devil did you get that check?"

"Pedro's," replied Lafe, briefly. "Now, I'll go after Diego. You find out all about the dead officers—what kind of bullets they were killed with. Pedro killed all of them. Let's prove it."

Chapter XX

"HANG HIM, OF COURSE!"

WORK is Nature's remedy for everything than can be cured. It is the only relief for a great sorrow. Miriam had no work to do—none, that is, save the small routine of petty household tasks that already had grown monotonous during past years.

She was out in the orchard, sitting on a stool in the sun, paring apples to dry. The Tilburys still did primitive things primitively. She quartered an apple, cored it, and dropped the pieces into a big dishpan. Her eyes were turned to the snowy crest of Timpangos. Her hands fell idle. The knife slipped from her fingers. The sun was warm on her head and shoulders, the bees buzzed about the mellow apples on the ground. The valley was filled with a stillness that seemed to brood over the final end of things.

Her father had gone back to his work in the canyon absorbed in his inventions. Lafe Jason had left that morning. And now, out here in the orchard, she imagined she could see Amos as a lad running about among the trees and hear his laughter and shouts in their tomboy play. Now he was gone; there was no comfort anywhere.

She jumped up. The pan fell from her lap, the apples scattering on the ground. She must do *something;* this simply was not endurable!

Across the field from Joseph Center a boy was running toward the red brick house. He saw her and called from the gate. "Miss Jones says for you to come to the telephone. Somebody wants you."

After a wait at the telephone office, the long distance connection was established again. The call was from Bingham, the Paris Café. The owner was offering her a job, at twenty dollars a week!

Miriam did not know all the forces that played a part in her mind and heart. She only knew that this was work—

wages—a chance to be busy. Within two hours she was on her way to Bingham.

Miriam was at the Paris Café next morning at eight o'clock ready for work. She was quick, and it took only a few minutes for her to learn how to use the cash register and handle the waiters' checks. From where she sat she could look out of the big plate glass window upon the street.

For two hours she was kept busy, as the long lunch counter did a thriving business of "stacks of wheats" and "ham and." She was so busy keeping her mind on the counter checks and the change from the cash register, that she forgot herself, and even found a certain pleasure in the casual greetings of the men who ventured various remarks as they took their change and reached for tooth picks in the glass holder at the end of the counter.

Then in the slack hours between late breakfast and early lunch, she was idle, and sat looking out on the street. All the morning she had noticed signs of unusual excitement. Two men came in and as they passed the cashier's desk on the way to stools at the lunch counter, she overheard a snatch of their talk.

"Muck's men got him last night."

"I suppose they'll string him up!"

"Surest thing you know." And they passed out of hearing.

Miriam's heart began pounding against her side. Whom were they judging and executing so casually? But the noon rush was on, and she had no further chance to learn what was the excitement in town, or what the two men had meant.

Around one o'clock Adolph Blucker entered the café with two men, lawyers. He recognized Miriam, and held out his hand. "What a surprise," he exclaimed. "When did you become a Binghamite?"

"Today. I went to work this morning." It was the first word of recognition, and it gave her a sense of pleasure.

"I'm certainly glad to see you." Then added, "You'll be lonesome for a while; I'll come around about four o'clock and take you for a drive and show you the mines."

"Thank you," she flushed, "I'm afraid I can't get off."

"I'll speak to Gregory about it." Blucker liked to display his influence.

The three took a booth, and when they had finished their lunch, the two lawyers went out together rather hurriedly. But Blucker lingered by the cashier's desk.

"What is the excitement?" Miriam had been watching the crowds gathering along the street.

"Waiting to see the bad man from the hills." Blucker laughed. "You know that shooter that was in with Pedro wasn't killed after all. He tried to sneak back into town last night, and they caught him. They are to take him from the jail directly to the justice's courtroom for preliminary trial. The crowd is waiting a chance to see a fellow who killed so many officers."

Miriam's throat was choking. She swallowed hard. "What—what will they do to him?"

"Hang him, of course; what else could they do? He must be coming now." Blucker stepped outside the door. Miriam left her desk and followed him to the walk.

Down the middle of the street came two officers and between them walked Lafe Jason. As he passed, Lafe turned his head, and for a passing second his eyes met Miriam's.

Chapter XXI

Joshua Waters Signs

IT WAS Wednesday evening before the trial. Lafe had returned to his room after another long day of fruitless search for Diego. For twenty-two days he had been combing the hills and gulches and nearby towns for the one witness that could give him a chance for his life.

Lafe threw himself down on the bed and lay on his back with his arms under his head, looking into the dark. He and Sample had tried every clue they could think of that might tend to prove that he was never in the tunnel and could not have fired any of the shots that killed the officers. They had failed utterly. The only possible evidence left would be the bullets from the dead bodies of the five men. That would require a post mortem examination of all five, now buried a month. It was very doubtful if Sample could force the court to order that. And even then, the evidence might not be conclusive.

He had not suggested Miriam as a witness. She could only prove what time he had arrived with Amos. And

that time was late enough to have made it possible for him to have been in the tunnel when the shooting occurred, and still reach Joseph Center when he did.

Lafe kicked the foot of the bed, and rocked his head on his arms. He clinched his teeth as his mind butted at the wall ahead of him. Two days more —and then the gallows, or life imprisonment.

He sat up in bed, his eyes open, his ears listening. There had been a creaking of the outside stairway, and a step at the door. There was a knock, a timid, scared knock, then quickly a light footstep going rapidly down the stairs. Whoever had knocked, had run away.

He swung the door open, expecting nothing. A man stood before him. Lafe stepped back, his hand on his gun. He was nervously ready at any moment for attack these days.

"Ees eet Señor Hason?" The voice sounded scared. The man at the door was Diego, the Mexican! "They treated me ver' bad."

Lafe had locked the door and given the Mexican a chair.

"You mean," he asked, drawing a chair up facing Diego, "that Blucker and Muck treated you badly?"

"*Si, si.*" He shrugged the left shoulder. The right, the one Jason had shot, was still bandaged. "They promise me five hundred dollar ef we keel Pedro—and when I got shot, they no pay, leave me to die like dog. But that not all!" The dark face grew black with hate. "They say they send man to me with money. He come at night. I get suspicious and sleep out of bed. He comes in with knife—and stabs, and stabs!" With his well arm, Diego illustrated the violent stabs into the dark bed.

"I see they goin' to keel me, I hide. She find me—ver' good to me—and breng me here."

"She?" Lafe's forehead wrinkled in a questioning frown, but cleared quickly. It was Maria. She knew he was hunting for Diego. "She is a very good woman!"

"*Si, si.* She ver' good to me."

Lafe telephoned for his attorney. Sample came promptly. He had never had a case on which he had worked harder, and made less progress. He was convinced Jason was innocent, but was completely stumped for evidence to prove it.

Diego repeated his story of being hired by Muck to kill Pedro and Jason. The attorney asked a few quick, eager questions, then turned to Lafe.

"Keep him here. I will be back directly."

He returned in half an hour with a notary public and a stenographer. Once more the Mexican told his story. It was taken down in shorthand, reread to him, and he signed it in the presence of a notary and witnesses on whose silence Sample could depend.

When the stenographer, witnesses and notary were gone, Sample, by a jerk of his hand, signaled Lafe to come outside with him. On the landing of the stairway he said hurriedly:

"Keep Diego close. Eat with him, *sleep* with him! Don't for heaven's sake let him get out of your sight until the trial Friday morning. I took his deposition merely as a precaution, in case he should change his mind or something happen to him."

The next day Sample sent a message to Graedle, attorney for Pinto, asking him to come to his office on a very important matter. Graedle and Sample had clashed on two or three occasions, and the attorney for the Pinto had a very wholesome fear of Sample on the warpath.

Sample gave his visitor a cigar, lighted one himself, and leaned back in his chair looking at Graedle significantly. "I have discovered," he said casually, "that Lafe Jason is innocent."

"Is *that* so?"

Sample nodded. "He carried a .38 revolver, and shot Muck three times in self defence. The three bullets were taken from Muck by the doctor. The gun is in the hands of the sheriff, showing the three empty cartridges, and three that remained loaded."

Graedle grinned as though listening to the prophecies of a witch doctor. His whole attitude expressed indulgence for another's folly.

"Pedro," continued Sample, "carried a .45 Colt. All the five officers killed, met death with a .45 bullet."

"You can prove that?" Graedle's interest was a little more alert.

"Certainly. Further, I can prove Jason was never in the cave at all. At the time of the battle he was carrying his friend, the boy, Amos Tilbury, whom Muck brutally assaulted, across

the mountains. The boy died from Muck's blow. Muck is the murderer."

"You can hardly hold an officer for defending himself."

"If he weighs two hundred, and his attacker is an unarmed, sick lad that weighs a hundred and twenty, the court might be prejudiced."

The two attorneys smoked for a moment, eyeing each other out of the corner of their eyes, Graedle wondering what Sample was getting at.

"But that is not the most interesting part." Sample leaned forward and tapped the edge of his desk with the ends of his fingers. "Did you know that your client—Adolph Blucker—owns the ground on which the Paloma Mine is located?"

"No!" Graedle lied, surprisedly.

"And that in the event of Pedro's death or inability to operate the mine, the lease, a very valuable one, reverts to Blucker?"

"What has that got to do with it?" Graedle spoke sharply. "What are you insinuating?"

"Facts," replied Sample evenly. "And here are some more. Blucker had Nevada Muck appointed deputy sheriff—and continued to carry him on the Pinto pay roll. And Muck hired two Mexicans—Carlos and Diego—to kill Pedro and Jason."

Graedle grinned sarcastically. "You haven't had a shot of opium, have you?"

"Here is Diego's confession—a copy of it." He picked up the long sheets and handed them across the table to the other lawyer.

"But what have I to do with this?" Graedle asked as his eyes ran down the page swiftly gathering the gist of the damaging confession.

"Nothing," replied Sample. "Only I thought you might be interested in helping me clear Jason."

"Helping you clear Lafe Jason?" Graedle looked up incredulously.

"Yes. You see, in order to clear *my* client—and of course I expect to clear him—I will have to introduce this very damaging evidence against *your* client, Adolph Blucker."

Graedle pitched the paper back on the desk, scratched his chin, and looked at Sample uneasily. "What do you suggest?"

"You have much influence with the prosecuting attorney. Suppose you suggest to him that the prosecuting witness, Nevada Muck, refuse to prosecute Lafe Jason; and that information entirely reliable has come to you that Jason is innocent. Therefore, it will be the best for all concerned for the prosecutor to ask the court Friday morning to dismiss the case."

Graedle studied for several moments, then nodded decisively. "I believe that would be the best thing for Bingham. We don't want to give the town a bad name. After all, it was merely a crazy Mexican that ran amuck of the officers."

"Certainly," said Sample smoothly, "and thanks for your assistance."

And Friday morning, much to the astonishment of the crowded courtroom, and more to the unbounded astonishment of Lafe Jason, the prosecuting attorney arose when the case was called and announced, "Your Honor, evidence has come to us which convinces the attorney for the State that Lafe Jason is entirely innocent of the charge against him. And the State wishes, with the Court's permission, to dismiss the case."

The Court promptly dismissed the case, and directed the clerk to return the defendant's $50,000 bond.

His sudden release came as a complete surprise to Lafe. He had not known of the interview between his attorney and Graedle.

Still bewildered by his unexpected freedom, he followed the crowd from the courtroom. Several men shook his hand. They sensed some peculiar force of circumstances back of the defendant's sudden release.

Lafe caught the sympathetic feeling of the crowd and it stirred him almost as much as did his release. It meant that he still had a fighting chance in this town to do what he had hoped to do.

Just outside the door he stopped on the top step to wait until the crowd scattered. He caught a glimpse in the moving mass, of a girl's cheek, saw the dark hair over her ears, the turn of her head. His breath quickened. It was Miriam. Forgetting that she hated him, that she had been in the company of his worst enemy, he started to elbow through the crowd toward her. But he was stopped by two men who bore down upon him like football players, Steve Johns and Jerry Dever.

"Come on," they said, "we'll paint the town red."

"No," Lafe smiled and shook his head, "red is not a favorite color of mine just now. I prefer the bank to Glick's Place for this check. But I'll meet you about seven at the—Paris Café."

"I'll have Joshua Waters there," Dever had an inspiration, "and we'll close up that deal interrupted by recent killings."

Steve Johns came to Lafe's room before seven. "I've got the process! I've worked out the plans for the mill. Once we prove what we can do, they'll break their necks trying to get money to us. It's sure luck, your getting out, old man, with that check in your pocket."

"And my head still on my neck," grinned Jason.

Lafe and Johns met Dever and Joshua Waters in front of the Paris Café. The old man shook Lafe's hand warmly, and offered congratulations.

Lafe stood nearest the door, and entered first. There was a lunch counter with high stools down the right hand side. Along the left wall a row of booths, with draw curtains over the doors.

"We'll get a booth," said Steve, taking charge of the party.

Lafe glanced toward the small cash register at the head of the long counter. A customer was making some wise crack at the girl cashier as she made change. The fellow picked up a toothpick, and passed on. The girl cashier looked up, and her eyes were fixed on Joshua Waters. Her eyes widened, her lips parted in a panic.

Lafe's mind made a swift leap. *Miriam was Joshua Waters' granddaughter!* He swallowed and started to speak. Steve Johns had caught the look, and jumped to the same conclusion—luckily, the right one—hastily stepped between Joshua Waters and the cashier, and took him by the arm, and led him back to the booth reserved. Jason, his face hot with the excitement of discovery, turned hastily and followed.

Miriam stared after them in deep agitation. Blucker's warning still was fresh in her mind; and here were the very men he warned her against, leading her grandfather into some sort of trap! She had never spoken to her grandfather, nor he to her, in her life. She did not know whether he had ever seen her or not. She must warn him at once. He had cast off her mother, disinherited all of them, yet she must save him from being robbed.

For the next half hour she was so absentminded that she made the wrong change twice. To one customer she gave change for a dollar when he had only given her fifty cents.

"Here, girlie," he held out the nickels and dimes in his hand, "you gave me too much." She put out her hand for it, he turned it into her palm and then squeezed her hand.

Others passed, and she tried to keep her mind on the cash register, but she was thinking of her grandfather. It was not likely they would do any business while eating, but she must warn him before they left.

She wrote on a scrap of paper:

Don't sign any papers with these men. They are tricking you.

She did not sign it, and hoped her grandfather would take the warning without knowing the sender. At least, it would make him cautious.

She called one of the Greek waiters. "Take this note, please, to that booth," she pointed out the one Johns' party had entered, "and give it to the old man with a gray beard."

The Greek shrugged and leered knowingly, but took the message.

Steve Johns' mind had been working double time. From that look in Miriam Tilbury's eyes, he guessed something was wrong. And he guessed it would not be well for the girl and the grandfather to meet now. He had drawn the papers on Joshua Waters, and even while the soup cooled, had read them and expounded them. The old fellow sat absent mindedly, his eyes turned to the wall of the booth.

Finally Steve produced a slip of paper. "Here's a check, Mr. Waters, a cashier's check for $10,000. We have $40,000 in the bank ready for work on the mill and the experiments. Suppose we sign up now, and then we can enjoy our dinner with a clear conscience."

Steve signed first, Jerry Dever next, and Lafe Jason third. Then the paper and the fountain pen were passed to Joshua Waters. The old man spread out the agreement, pen in his fingers. "It seems to be all regular and fair," he said, dreamily. The pen paused over

the remaining blank line of the contract.

"It is," said Steve. "Either we succeed, and all get a fortune, or the mine goes back to you, and you get the benefit of our development and experiment without a cent of cost."

"I have had lots of chances to sell the mountain," he said reflectively, "but I always drew back from parting with it."

Dever squirmed in agony at the delay, and under cover of the table Steve kicked him as a signal to be still.

"I am doing this," said Joshua Waters, stroking his chin slowly, "because I like you young men and believe in you." Again the pen hovered near the paper.

The curtain of the booth parted, the head of a Greek waiter appeared. Steve had looked up sharply at the interruption, and both Dever and Lafe held their breath. The Greek held out a folded slip of paper and motioned, with a wink, that it was for the old man. Steve glanced swiftly. Joshua Waters, deep in reflection over Mount Soledad, had paid no attention to the waiter. Johns nodded understandingly, and took the paper from the Greek's hand, and left a dollar in its place. Under the edge of the table, he read it. And then slipped it to Lafe.

Lafe's eyes bent on the message, felt clammy sweat start forth in the palms of his hands. Crook! Traitor! That was what Miriam Tilbury thought of him. His eyes came up from the paper, and he heard a sigh from the fattish Jerry Dever. Joshua Waters just had signed the agreement.

Lafe did not even look toward Miriam as they left the café. At the sidewalk he said, "I must go see Diego. I promised to look after him until he is able to work."

"I'll go with you," proposed Steve Johns.

"Diego told me," Lafe said as they followed the street south, "that he lives in the old adobe beyond the creek, in the canyon southeast of Soledad."

They walked out past the lights of the town, where Bingham's street became a canyon road. Steve stopped and pointed across the creek to a park patch among the cottonwoods. "Is that the place?"

"I think so." Lafe leaped the stream and started for the adobe hut. It was a dark, squat object in the dim starlight, and a darker splotch marked the door. He stood listening for a moment. It was still inside, and dark. In the distance came faintly the noise of Bingham's night life, and down the canyon for three miles one's eye followed the twisted line of electric lights. But here was only the darkness and the rustling cottonwoods.

Lafe's heart was thumping uneasily as he knocked. There was no response. Steve touched him on the elbow and spoke in a low tone. "I guess he's moved."

"Let's go in," Lafe suggested, but Steve drew back.

"No, let's don't."

Lafe put his foot against the door and pushed. It was not fastened. Again he pushed and shoved it wider open, stepping back quickly out of range.

There was no movement or sound inside. But something in that darkness filled him with increasing terror. It affected Steve, too. "Let's go." Steve pulled at Lafe's arm.

"No," Lafe tried to speak boldly. He fished in his vest pocket and found a match, and struck it on the side of the adobe wall. Holding the flickering blaze in front of him, he advanced into the room. For a moment he stood staring down into the semi-darkness, then gasped, dropped the match and backed out hastily, bumping into Steve.

"He's dead!" said Lafe hollowly.

Directly he got up courage, lighted another match and they went in. Stooping over the body, they saw the head had been crushed with a bar of iron which lay beside the dead Mexican. They left hurriedly, leaving the door open, and were almost running when they leaped the small stream.

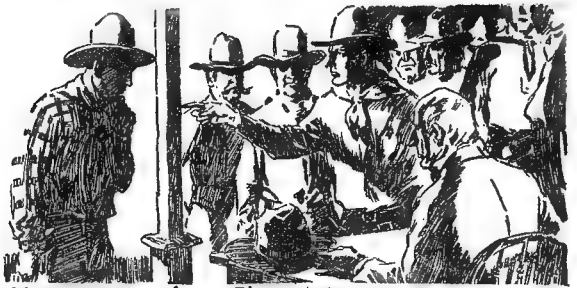
"And that's the way they get rid of witnesses," said Johns. Neither spoke again until they were near the edge of town.

"Blucker has not quit." Lafe spoke his conclusions aloud. "He is merely covering his tracks. I am to be the next."

"What are you going to do?" Steve was shaken by the brutal murder.

Lafe's fist came down resoundingly in the palm of its mate. "Reopen Pedro's mine in the morning!" he answered grimly.

(*Part III of* "MANACLED MILLIONS" *in the next issue.*)



LIKE A GENTLEMAN

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Such impeccable manners seemed peculiar indeed, in an outlaw about to be hanged. Lanky was a rustler of poise and deep resource, however, as the sheriff was to discover.

WHEN Lanky stepped down into the street he was conscious of an atmospheric change. It was not the weather. Over the huddled shanties of La Junta swam the pure quiet light of a perfect August morning, and there were no indications of a barometrical disturbance. But Lanky knew there was a storm brewing. He knew it because he saw heads sticking out of the windows, saw men lounging near convenient doorways—knew it because over the street had settled a sepulchral calm. He knew also that he was to be the storm center. Suddenly alert over the knowledge that his intuition brought him, he halted abruptly, smiled mirthlessly, and placed his back against the rough board front of the Alhambra Saloon. Then he loosed his .45's, folded his arms over his chest, and gazed above him meditatively. This was an indication that he was ready for the storm.

It was not the first time that Lanky had played heroics for the edification of La Junta's citizens. He was La Junta's only two-gun man, and La Junta had a decent respect for his ability in directing the leaden messages of a .45. Lanky knew this was why furtive eyes regarded him from many windows. But if he suspected La Junta's citizens of an intimate knowledge of his present distressing calm he gave no sign. His eyes, narrowed to slits, blinked comprehensively at a little group of men who conversed together a little way down the street. Lanky knew this group for La Junta's vigilance committee. Among them was Bob Hiller, the town marshal.

Lanky could not have protested innocence of La Junta's unearthly quietness. Rumor had thrown a choice morsel to her regiment of tongues. It was known that the vigilance committee was after Lanky. And when the vigilance committee went after anyone they generally got him. Tradition said that defeat had been written into the records of the committee only once, and that was when a suspect had contrived to get twenty-four hours' start of the committee, after killing a man unlawfully. Individually and collectively, the committee had thereafter labored heroically to remove this blot. And so Lanky knew exactly what his chances were.

But Lanky had a reputation to sustain. His coolness in the face of danger was not mere bravado; he was known to be the nerviest, suppliest, slowest lightning flash of a man in Colorado. For this reason when the vigilance committee headed by Bob Hiller, came slowly toward Lanky, La Junta's timorous citizens watched fearfully from their comparative security.

It was Hiller who broke the silence as the committee came within speaking distance of Lanky. "We want to talk," said Hiller, speaking gently, as though

he and his fellow vigilantes sought a favor; "and we ain't hankering after any gun play."

Lanky smiled, his hands resting on his hips immediately above the holsters of his guns. The smile was satirical. "Then don't come any closer," he said.

The committee halted suddenly, laboring with indecision. To the last man its members had their hands folded over their chests. This position was suggestive of the committee's peaceful intentions.

"This here committee," resumed Hiller, "is a legally authorized limb of the law. It knows for the last two months you've been rustling cattle. It knows for the last two months you and some person or persons unknown have stolen cattle and shipped them over to the Santa Fe at Trinidad. And it knows, also, that three nights ago you and another rustler killed Colonel Daniels at Bar K, when he caught you cutting out a bunch of his stock. Daniels' foreman says he was near enough to see that you was one of the men, and he says he followed you almost to Purgatory Crossing before you shook him. You've been long enough around this country to know what happens to cattle thieves when they're caught. We're expecting you to act the gentleman."

This was a long speech for the town marshal; not in ten years had he so spared the feelings of a culprit. And every one of the five other men who composed the committee knew why he had shown the virtue of forbearance in this instance. They all knew the significance of Lanky's cold, glittering glance and the contemptuous, sneering curl of his lips. Once they had seen this expression on his face when he stood in the card room of the Alhambra deliberately shooting the life out of a gambler who had cheated him. And now they waited breathlessly, though with expressionless faces, for Lanky to make his choice. They knew that in case Lanky chose to fight several of them must die before they could get their weapons out of their holsters. And yet, so great was their courage, that Lanky, sweeping a glance over them, saw no sign of the death fear in their faces.

"I reckon on acting the gentleman," said Lanky quietly. "There's no use being obstinate." He hesitated, looking from one to the other with a glance of amusement.

"You've got me," he said. "I didn't think the Colonel's foreman would know me. He wouldn't have known me if—" He stopped short, and looked gravely at Hiller; evidently he had come near betraying something he had intended to keep secret. He saw a flash of curiosity in Hiller's eyes, and he smiled with saturnine humor. "If he hadn't saw me," he said, concluding the sentence.

"Of course," assented Hiller, the grim lines of his lips softening with appreciation; "of course—if he hadn't saw you." Hiller shifted his eyes from Lanky's, speaking with blunt frankness.

"I expect Daniels' foreman might have seen the man who was with you if you hadn't helped him onto his horse after the foreman shot him."

Lanky's eyes searched Hiller's face with a rapid glance. Then his lips formed two straight lines and he stared stonily before him as though he had not heard.

"Of course, you won't tell who it was," resumed Hiller. "But I've sent word to my son, Tuck, who is over in Trinidad, to have the sheriff look out for a wounded rustler. He was headed for Trinidad, the last Daniels' foreman saw of him, and Tuck will get him—if he's alive."

Lanky's lips curved into a grim smile but he kept silent.

"You might as well tell," suggested Hiller; "Tuck will get him anyway." Hiller's tongue lingered over his son's name. Lanky knew how great was the father's pride.

"To listen to you," he said ironically, "a man might think Tuck was as good a thief catcher as his father. Not that I mean to compliment you." His glance rested upon Hiller with singular subtleness. "Don't you worry; Tuck won't catch him." He looked up and down La Junta's one street. The heads that had previously projected very slightly from the windows were now stretched far out; the former loungers of the doorways had left the security of their retreats and were now cautiously coming into view. A stir had come; action had succeeded inaction. Some hundred yards down the street a group of men had collected; everywhere were the unmistakable sounds of renewed life. By some unknown telepathy it became

known that La Junta had safely passed a crisis, that Lanky's guns were not to belch forth death, and that it was now safe to resume the interrupted freedom of movement. Lanky smiled contemptuously.

"Like women," he said jerking a thumb toward the gathering audience. "A man can't be decently hanged."

Hiller deliberately turned his back to Lanky and drew his heavy revolver, leveling it above the heads of the men down the street. Before the reverberating roar had died away the street was again deserted. Like scurrying rats the populace had vanished. Before turning to Lanky, Hiller had replaced his weapon in its holster.

"There won't be any audience," he said gently; "we'll hang you in the regular way."

"Thanks," said Lanky. He gazed lingeringly upon the butts of his pistols.

"I suppose you want them?" he interrogated.

"It would look more regular," suggested Hiller mildly.

Lanky's eyes swept the faces of the men of the committee with the smoldering fierceness that the committee knew so well. His fingers caressed the butts of his pistols as though he were loath to part with them without a last fight.

"I want you all to know that I ain't giving up because I'm afraid of your guns," he said with accusing heat. "Chances are that I might get four or five of you before you could put me out of business."

"We're friends of your'n," argued Hiller gravely; "and we wouldn't want to have any unpleasantness. It wouldn't be regular, and it would set a bad example."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Lanky. He swept his guns from his holsters and twirled them for an instant, using each trigger guard as an axis. Then he grasped them by the muzzles and extended them toward Hiller. Hiller took them, sticking them between his shirt and the waistband of his trousers in front. For a solemn moment Lanky gazed ruefully down at his empty holsters, and then he raised his head and looked at Hiller.

"Well?" he said quietly.

"I expect we'd better go," returned Hiller, answering the look. He hesitated and then spoke gently.

"The cottonwoods?" he suggested.

A grim smile flitted over Lanky's face. "Anywheres," he returned, meeting Hiller's eyes; "you're the boss now."

"Didn't know but what you might have thought of a place you liked better," delicately observed Hiller.

"One place is good as another to hang in," commented Lanky. "I reckon the cottonwoods won't know the difference."

"Then we'll go," said Hiller.

Five minutes later seven horsemen passed out of La Junta, riding slowly in the direction of the cottonwoods. Flank to flank the horses of Hiller and Lanky loped companionably. Miles away the cottonwood clump fringed the ragged skyline. For an hour nothing broke the silence except the dull drumming of the light hoofs on the matted alfalfa. Then Hiller threw an experimental glance at Lanky, which the latter caught.

"I've thought," said Lanky, quite casually, "that if I'd been married and had kept out of bad company I might have been different. I never heard of a married man rustling cattle."

"They're too busy minding the kids," returned Hiller, thinking of the joys of his early fatherhood.

"I ain't mushing," remarked Lanky, after a pause, during which Hiller's thoughts dwelt upon the possibility of his son Tuck ever meeting the end which was destined for Lanky; "but I've wondered how it felt to be the father of a boy—a good brave-hearted boy like Tuck, for instance."

Hiller gulped. A thrilling pride surged coldly down his spine and his eyes met Lanky's.

"It's like having a good year with cattle jumping to seventy dollars a head. Only more so," he said.

"Must be," replied Lanky.

They rode in silence.

"It ain't hard to keep a boy straight," commented Lanky then. "That is if you watch him. I never had anyone to watch me like you watch Tuck, for instance."

Hiller reddened slightly, and then, moved to speech, he said, "I reckon I can't plead guilty to watching Tuck much. Never thought he needed it. He's kind of drifted along and made a man of himself. There's been times though when I thought he wouldn't."

Lanky smiled sadly into Hiller's eyes. "I expect if I had been Tuck's father, I

would have noticed it before," he observed, staring meditatively at the other members of the committee, who were riding far ahead.

Hiller stiffened in his saddle. "Noticed what?" he questioned sharply.

"That Tuck had got into bad company," responded Lanky without looking at Hiller.

Hiller's face paled with the vague fear that had crept into his heart. "Look here, Lanky," he said abruptly, "you don't mean that Tuck has done anything in your line?"

Lanky kept his face averted, his eyes drooping from Hiller's tense gaze. "I mean," he said with reluctant pauses, "that Tuck helped me to do the Daniels job. It was him that bored the colonel!"

"You damned liar!"

One of Hiller's big pistols was out. It lay against the pommel of his saddle, its muzzle threatening Lanky.

"You damned liar!" he said again, his face twitching convulsively.

"Of course, you can call me what you like—now," returned Lanky with a plaintiveness that grated oddly; "you've got me, and you've got my guns. But that don't make it right. Tuck got a bad hole in his side from the foreman's gun, and I helped him get away. He's over in Trinidad now getting it fixed up. That's why I told you back in town that Tuck wouldn't get the rustler you said had got away. A man can't very well capture himself, can he?"

Hiller did not answer, but taking advantage of Lanky's apparent preoccupation he covertly sheathed his weapon.

"Of course," said Lanky presently, "I expect it would be embarrassing for you if the boys knew Tuck had killed the colonel. Do you reckon it would make much difference to them that Tuck is your boy?"

Hiller did not answer. He was thinking of many things that chilled his blood with horror. He shuddered over the imaginary picture of his boy swinging at the end of a rope in the cottonwoods toward which they were now riding. He caught Lanky looking at him pityingly, and he bowed his head over his horse's mane.

"It's hard to know that your boy has got to be strung up as a cattle thief," spoke Lanky with sympathetic tenderness. "Especially when you thought all along that he was making a man of himself. I ain't in no way to blame though," he went on palliatively, for he saw the fire of accusation in Hiller's eyes. "I told him we didn't want him fooling around with other people's cattle, and I tried to keep him from shooting the colonel. But he wouldn't listen. He'll tell you that when you see him," he concluded.

Hiller turned to Lanky, his face set with a sudden resolution. "Does anyone else know of this?" he questioned hoarsely.

"Not that I know of," said Lanky, "except a man in Trinidad. You see, I kept the colonel's foreman from getting too close to Tuck, and I took him to Trinidad at night and left him with a friend." He cleared his throat and fidgeted with embarrassment. "But of course, they'll know now," he added hesitatingly.

"How?" The monosyllable came to Hiller's lips with snapping menace.

Lanky bent a glance of peculiar meaning upon Hiller. "Well, you see," he said suddenly aggressive, "you're the boss of this little ceremony that they're going to have over in the cottonwoods, and you're going to hang a man who saved your son from hanging by taking a chance of getting caught. And it don't seem nowise just or fair for you to hang me when you know Tuck killed the colonel. And," he added coldly, "though I ain't so hard hearted that I ain't got pity for you and the kid, if you're going to hang me for something that Tuck done I'm going to peach when the time comes. That'll be when the boys have the rope in their hands."

Hiller's eyes lighted with a cunning, venomous glare. "You won't peach," he said quietly. And there was heavy finality in his voice. His pistol came out again.

"Of course, you can shoot me," said Lanky, unmoved. "It'll save the trouble of hanging me. And I'll be satisfied. But it won't help Tuck any. As soon as my friend hears of it, he'll tell the sheriff about Tuck being the man who killed the colonel." He paused to give his words time to soak in. Then he spoke again, his voice mellow with the flavor of insinuation, "Them boys is a long ways off." He nodded toward a ballooning dust cloud that enveloped the other members of the committee. "They won't need to hang me if you don't

want them to. My horse is fresh and I can hit the line of New Mexico in three hours, barring accidents."

For some time Hiller rode on in deep study. "What would I say to the boys?"

Lanky smiled into space. "It wouldn't be the first time that a man had his guns taken away from him—and has managed to dig up another from his waistband. And I reckon that the boys will figure that Lanky with one gun and the drop is a heap more dangerous than Bob Hiller with three guns and no drop."

Hiller reined in his horse and gazed meditatively at the dust cloud that was now nearing the cottonwood. Then he drew Lanky's two guns from his waistband and passed them over.

"Well then, *git!*" he commanded.

In an instant Lanky was a volcano of action. Slipping his guns into their holsters he wheeled his horse so abruptly that the animal stood erect on his haunches. Then, applying his spurs, Lanky rapidly placed a hundred yards between himself and Hiller. But at that distance he drew rein and looked back over his shoulder.

"I want to tell you," he yelled, "to talk to Tuck about the danger of bad company."

And then, above the clatter of his horse's hoofs, came the rippling cadence of a mocking laugh.

The members of the vigilance committee failed to enthuse when one of them suggested that they endeavor to recapture Lanky. Such procedure was unwarranted in view of the facts that had been communicated to them by Hiller. These were few, but disheartening. Lanky had a good half hour's start, his horse was fresh, and the New Mexican border was only three hours away, riding hard. Lanky had regained his two guns and each member of the committee was admittedly unwilling to get within range of them.

And so the committee returned to La Junta having been relieved of a great responsibility, and saying no word to any man regarding the outcome of their trip to the cottonwoods. But when Bob Hiller passed down La Junta's one street and came to a halt in front of his domicile, he stared in dumb astonishment at a familiar figure that stood in the doorway—a young man, lithe of limb and strong in health and vigor.

Hiller said nothing until he had dismounted. Then he walked toward the young man, his eyes searching for something which, evidently, he could not find. "Tuck," he said to the young man, "I thought you were in Trinidad?"

"Left there this morning," returned the young man glibly. "Came over to tell you that we got the rustler you sent word about. Strung him up quick to get rid of him." He now turned questioner. "Did you get rid of Lanky?"

But Hiller's reply was merely an incoherent gurgle.

When Man Meets Man

By Jay Lucas

Author of "The Passing of Judge Colt," etc.

Transplanting a Kentucky mountain blood feud to the open cattle range of Arizona, brought about a queer, indescribable change in the spirit of it. Dave Cole came face to face with a strange impulse even as he tightened a noose about the neck of the last of the Bentleys.

SO DAVE COLE'S in town, you say."

Young Jeff Bentley took the brown cigarette from his mouth, and a cloud passed slowly over his face. He stared broodingly down upon the smaller cowboy, Shorty Long, of his father's outfit. "Now what," he continued, half to himself, "has that Virginian to do with it?"

"What!" Shorty spat disgustedly. *"What!* I'll tell you what! He's a hired gunman old Ford got to help clean us up, just like that little snake of a Slim Tooker; *that's* what!"

Young Jeff shook his head slowly. "Sure looks like it; but that wasn't how we did it back in Kentucky. A feud was a family affair there, and outsiders had nothing to do with it. An' he doesn't look like a hired gunman—sort of square-lookin', not shifty eyed, like Slim."

Shorty hesitated before speaking again, then looked straight at his taller cowboy companion. "Jeff, you've spent pretty near all your life here in Arizona, an' you know we don't ask anything about another feller's business out here. But it looks like we're going to have to shoot it out with the Fords sooner or later, an' I'll be in it too, of course. Do you mind tellin' me what started the trouble back there? I hear there's been a good many Fords an' Bentleys killed in that feud affair of yours. Of course," he hastened on, "if it's anything you don't want me to know—I never heard anyone talkin' about it—"

Young Jeff interrupted with a bitter laugh. "No, you didn't hear how it started!" He threw his cigarette into the dust of the street and stamped it with his high bootheel. "I *know* you didn't hear how it started! Neither did anyone else, for sure. They sometimes say that a Ford spanked a Bentley about a hundred years ago, for throwin' a rock at a hog, an' that started all that killin'. Some say it was a Bentley spanked a Ford, instead. An' here we are, shootin' on sight. Wonder what sort of accident made old man Ford buy the outfit next us!"

Shorty was staring incredulously. "But what—why don't you *quit?* That's not how we do things out here in Arizona! Why, jest look at me an' my partner, Red Bassett! First time we met he shot the brim off'n my hat, an' I plugged him through the shoulder. Then I paid Doc Sheldon for bandaging his shoulder an' he bought me a new hat, an' we've been working together on your dad's outfit ever since. We got to be partners in a week, an'," he asserted loyally, "ol' Red's the best partner I ever had!"

"An' that's the hairy chested way to do it!" agreed Jeff. "If you're down on a feller, shoot it out with him; an' if you live over it, make friends with him

for bein' no better shot than you are. Killin's bad, but it's better than holdin' grudges, though I didn't look at it that way when I first came from the Kentucky mountains. I thought shootin' a Ford—in the back or any other way—was as good an act as shootin' a horse killin' panther! Lord, what heathens we was back there! The trouble is that Dad an' old Ford was too old when they came here to change their ways. But hirin' paid gunmen—that's dirty business!"

"Yeuh, that Virginian should be shot, for—" Shorty broke off, and edged away uncomfortably; he was far, far from being a ladies' man! "Here comes that cousin of yours."

Jeff's face cleared as he saw his cousin, Nell Bentley, who had become a sister to him, emerge from a store, her silver mounted spurs tinkling on trimly booted heels. At sight of him, she quickly thrust into the pocket of her riding skirt a small object that she evidently just had purchased. But Jeff, with the quick eye of the mountaineer, had identified it instantly—a green silk handkerchief with a narrow red border. A surprise present for him, possibly, he thought, as he smiled down upon her. Of course he would not mention having seen it; he would show the proper big brother surprise when she presented it to him.

"Jeffie." He smiled down on her again from his bulky six foot one at the diminutive she had coined for him. "Jeffie, are you ready to go home?"

"Pretty near. You ready?"

"Just have to go to the drug store for a few minutes."

"To buy some complexion? Well, while you're there I'll get a box of forty-fives, an' then I'll go get the horses."

"Jeffie," she placed her hand on his arm, "Dave Cole's in town, and you know what that means. Ford's here too. Let's hurry and get away. Let the cartridges go until next time you're in."

"Sorry, Nell, but I have to have 'em; I'm just about out. Won't take long to get them, though."

"You must use lots of cartridges! Practicing on quail on the wing must cost a good deal. Well, hurry up; I'll be ready to go in a few minutes."

She hurried down the street, and disappeared in the drug store. Jeff turned toward the general store, but paused. He had forgotten that her horse had a loose shoe that he had to reset. Perhaps he had better do that first, and then get the cartridges. He swung up the side street toward the livery stable.

Half an hour later he rode back, leading Nell's horse. He tied both it and his own to the hitching rack before the store, and purchased the cartridges, which he stuffed in the pocket of his chaps. Then he started out to hunt for Nell, who the clerk told him had gone to the bootmaker's. He walked slowly, his head hanging down, brooding. Why, he wondered, could not the Fords and the Bentleys forget their old feud of the Kentucky mountains? It seemed so out of place here in Arizona, where people were quick to anger, but quicker still to forget. But that the feud had been carried here with all its bitterness could not be denied. Soon it must come to a showdown. There seemed to be no way to avoid that, little use in *trying* to avoid the Ford men, as he had been doing. This avoiding of them rankled; he was not afraid of them. Yes, it had to come, and, perhaps, the sooner the better. Wouldn't the open clash be better than the suspense? Jeff turned the corner toward the bootshop, still brooding, his eyes toward the earth.

"Oh, excuse me!" He had bumped into another man, almost upsetting him.

The other recoiled, scowling. "Suh, back in Vi'ginia, whe' I come f'um, a pusson watches whe' he's agoin', an' doesn't try to knock people down on the street!"

"Sho' sorry, partner," Jeff spoke placatingly, "I didn't see you." The clash had come, but he would not hurry things. Dave Cole was evidently ready and asking for trouble.

"An' I don't let *no niggeh-hai'ed Bentley* call me pahtneh, suh!"

Jeff, Arizonian though he now claimed to be, was still a Southerner at heart. The blood rushed quickly to his face, then slowly ebbed away, leaving him white. For an instant he paused, then, with a movement of anger, he dashed his wide hat to the street, baring his curly mop of black hair, and stepped forward.

"Takin' that back, Cole?" His voice was dangerously quiet.

"I neveh took nothin' back yet that I said to a niggeh-hai'ed Bentley."

There were no more wasted words.

Dave Cole was no mean foe; normally he could have given Jeff a long battle, but this time a stiff blow caught him unready. The fight was soon over, with Dave on the ground, battered and bleeding.

Jeff stepped over him. "Now, Cole, do you take back what you said?"

"No, by hell! I neveh yet saw the niggeh-hai'ed Bentley that could make me take anything back!"

Jeff's teeth bared in a rage, and he drew back his foot as though to kick. "Take it back! Take that back, or I'll kill you!"

"Then, kill an' be damned!"

Suddenly Jeff felt himself jerked aside, and confronting the burly, bearded figure of old Simon Ford. Behind Simon, at a safe distance, lurked his satellite, Slim Tooker, his hand quivering like a hawk above the butt of his gun.

"So that's how you do, is it! Knock a man down while he ain't a-lookin', an' then staht to kick him while he's down! So that's how you do! Jest like any otheh niggeh-hai'ed Bentley!" The old man's eyes blazed in his wrinkled, weatherbeaten face, where it appeared above the gray beard. He shook his fist at Jeff. "Now you have a ready an' r'arin' man to whip, ef yo' man enough to try it, you damned niggeh-hai'ed Bentley!"

Jeff hesitated an instant at sight of the gray hair. But "nigger-haired" was the old Ford war cry! Jeff drew back his fist to strike. Then he felt his elbow seized in a firm grasp, and whirled to face Buck Connors, the local deputy sheriff.

"What's all this about, Jeff?" demanded Buck. Then, without waiting for an answer, "Some more of that Kentucky hill-billy stuff you people brought here with you?"

"What is it! What is it!" roared old Simon, "I'll tell you what it is! That damned niggeh-hai'ed Bentley knocked Dave heah down while he wasn't lookin', an' then stahted to kick him to death while he was down! That's what it is, mo' dirty work of the niggeh-hai'ed Bentleys!"

"Yeuh, yeuh!" Slim Tooker squeaked, in a dry, hoarse voice that matched his shifty eye, "It's jest like ol' Simon here says; them Bentleys always causin' trouble. I was here an' saw it all; 'twas all Jeff's fault!"

Buck turned on him sourly; he well knew his breed. And Buck had seen him covertly returning his gun to the holster, behind Jeff's back, as he saw the deputy approach. "That'll do from you! You, Simon, get out of town, an' take Cole with you." He ignored Slim. That rat would give no trouble in the open; he was not that kind.

When they had gone, he turned to Jeff, and seized him by the shoulder. "An' you, Jeff," he shook him savagely, "you're jest as bad, always gettin' in some row or other. Next time I'll run you in the calaboose. I've been too easy on the whole lot o' you!"

But Jeff had not heard; he was staring after Dave Cole. For as Dave had turned away, Jeff had seen, just peeping from his hip pocket, the corner of a *new green silk handkerchief with a narrow red border!*

Then Jeff turned back to Buck. "Buck," his voice was dangerously quiet and even, "I'm the one that's been too easy with that mess o' snakes! I'm through bein' easy. They've started something, an' I'm a-goin' to finish it."

"You damned fool!" Buck swore heartily at him; he liked the big cowboy, and did not want to see him get in trouble, "You blamed rumpus hunter, I thought you had some sense. You been raised here in Arizona, an' claim to be civilized. Just make one more break, though, in town or out, an' I'll take a hand in that hill-billy war o' yours, an' put a few of you where you'll forget it for a while."

"Do as you like, Buck, but I've stood for all I'm a-goin' to. I'm a-goin' to finish that business, an' before long." He swung on his heel, and started toward his horse, to dash out of town without waiting for Nell, although he had seen her coming up the street hurriedly.

He did not go directly to the ranch, but rode around until dark, listlessly looking over the cattle. When he got home, Nell had supper still waiting for him, although she and his father had eaten.

The old man hobbled out to meet him, and placed his hand on his shoulder. "Son," he chuckled, in his cracked voice, "Yo' a Bentley all right, though I thought yo' was a-goin' back on yo'

raisin'. Whipped one o' the Fo'd gang, an' would 'a' whipped the ol' man but fo' the law. Use yo' gun next time, son, an' clean out that gang o' skunks! The's only two o' 'em left now, Simon, an' his boy, Dave, back in Kentucky. We got all the rest o' 'em. Git them two, son, fust chance yo' git, an' yo'll sho' make yo' ol' dad happy." He turned to Nell. "Whut yo' think o' my boy now, Nell? Ain't he a Bentley, an' a good one?"

Nell's lips trembled, and she turned her back to draw warm biscuits from the stove for Jeff's supper. He ate hastily, then sat moodily in a corner, to fill his cartridge belt from the box of cartridges he had purchased in town.

Nell came to him quietly, and placed her hand on his shoulder. "What's the matter, Jeff?" she asked quietly. "What are you angry at *me* about?"

Jeff sprang to his feet, and stood glaring at her. "Not a thing!" he spoke sarcastically, "Not a danged thing! Everything's jest fine!"

He savagely threw his cartridge belt into a corner, and strode to his room. There, he barred his door, and threw himself face downward on his bed.

He slept little that night, and was up early next morning. He gulped a scant and silent breakfast, and was silently buckling on his gun belt when Nell approached him.

"Jeff," she asked quietly, "what's the matter?"

"Nothin'. Jest nothin' at all! Everything's fine!"

"There *is* something the matter, Jeff. I want to ask you *why* can't you forget that trouble between our people and the Fords? What are you all fighting about, anyway?"

"Huh!" snorted Old Jeff, from his seat by the fireplace, "The Fords have stahted it, an' we' jest a-goin' to show 'em thet we can finish it!"

"Jeff," she murmured, placing her hand on his arm, "won't you leave the Fords alone? Please forget that old trouble!"

Jeff angrily reached for his hat, then whirled on her savagely. "Forgit it!" he glared at her. "The Fords have started it, an' I'm a-goin' to finish it!" He stamped angrily from the house, sprang to his horse, and dashed away through the cedars.

For a mile he rode furiously; then his temper cooled rapidly. He drew his sweating horse to a running walk. He had to go over to the roundup, which was to camp near the Ford ranch that evening, and help to drive home the strays in his brand. But no! Maybe he'd better not go there. Dave and old Simon would be sure to be there, and he'd be bound to get in trouble, so soon after the fight in town. All his cowboys but Shorty Long were with the roundup; they could drive the strays back without his help, and he'd avoid the Ford men for a week or two. If old Simon would only sell out, and go back to Kentucky!

A quail whirred up from under his horse's hoofs. It was almost a reflex action for his gun to spring to his hand. The quail fluttered to the ground, a crumpled mass of feathers. He reloaded his gun.

"Good!" he murmured, "I'm hittin' three out of five now, an' when I started practicin' on 'em last year, I could only hit one out of six—an' I was called a quick shot then."

He turned his horse east. It would be well to ride the country in the neighborhood of the Ford ranch. They might not actually steal his calves; but a maverick could scarcely be weaned a day before it wore the Triangle Box. Of course he treated the Ford calves the same way—nothing wrong in that. He couldn't be expected to brand Ford's calves for him, having trouble with the outfit as he was, and a maverick belonged to whoever branded it. But he wouldn't go within sight of the ranch; better not!

He climbed the steep trail onto the cedar mesa under the other rim of which lay the Triangle Box ranch-houses. Riding slowly as he was in the cedar humus, he made little noise. At the edge of a little opening he silently drew his horse to a stop, and carefully shook down his rawhide riata. Then, a touch of the spurs, a quick flip of the reins, a sudden dash before his quarry knew of his presence. A twitch of the wrist, and a glossy yearling maverick was struggling on the end of his rope, soon to wear his brand.

The cowboy never lived who could refrain from whistling as he tied his rope back on his saddle horn, and watched a big maverick disappear through the cedars, a trace of blood on

his fresh ear marks, and a black brand still smoking on its hip. Jeff was no exception. He was still whistling softly as he again, turned east through the cedars.

His whistling ceased, but his mood had not changed, as he came close to the head of the trail that led down to the Ford place. He rode slowly along the trail; indeed, the cedars were so dense that it was almost impossible to leave it. He could turn along the bare rim of the mesa, northward.

Suddenly a quail whirred up from near his horse, and swung around a big cedar in front of him. Before he could stop himself, his forty-five had roared. The quail continued on unhurt. He stopped his horse to reload his gun, and again his lips pursed to whistle softly. What if he had missed a quail! Hadn't he just branded a maverick!

Suddenly he paused, and the color fled his face. What was that sound just around the bend in the trail? His gun still held by the barrel, he spurred fearfully around the cedar.

Old Simon Ford, the blood streaming from his chest, was on his knees, his hands clutching the trunk of the cedar. Even then his hold relaxed, and he slumped to the ground.

Jeff sprang from his horse, dropping his gun. With a bound, he was beside old Simon, raising his head. He could feel the blood on his back, where the bullet had entered.

"My God, Simon, did I get you!" he panted.

Old Simon's eyes fluttered open; he tried to speak, but a red stain came to his lips, and he closed his eyes again. Jeff bent close to his ear.

"Simon, old man, I ain't never held no hard feelin's ag'in the Fords. I jest shot at a quail, not knowin' you was there. Don't you believe me, Simon? I didn't aim to kill you!"

Again Simon's eyes fluttered open. Again he tried to speak, tried hard. There was a curious friendly light in his eyes such as Jeff had never seen there before. Now, at the point of death, he seemed to see the futility of the old feud that he had pursued so bitterly during his life. His fingers closed on Jeff's hand. Then he coughed feebly, and a red foam stained his lips. He slumped limply back in Jeff's arms, and slipped to the ground.

Jeff stood gazing down on him in horror—on his lifelong enemy, who had died his friend. Thank God that he had understood! But what was that sound around the bend in the trail? An approaching horse! Jeff tensed, and sprang to recover his gun, which still lay where he had dropped it at the bend. Full well he knew how it would look to anyone who found him standing over the body of old Simon, who had just been shot in the back. As he straightened up, his gun in his hand, he faced Dave Cole, who was riding slowly toward him. Dave jerked his horse to a stop, and his hand flashed toward his holster. But Jeff did not wait. He jumped back into the concealment of the cedar, sprang to his horse, and dashed madly down the trail and past the Ford ranch-houses.

As he struck the level, open ground at the foot of the trail, what he had been expecting came—a spurt of dust beside his horse, the crack of a carbine from the rim.

Spurring and quirting frantically, he dashed across the flat. His hat jumped from his head. His horse shied wildly to one side, and a backward glance showed a red scar on its thigh. Just a hundred yards to the point of the cedar-brake now! His horse sank screaming under him. A chance shot had cut its spine close to the tail. He stopped to shoot it through the head before springing down into the shelter of the wash beside which he had been racing. Along the wash, into the cedars, he ran. Then, leaving the wash, he discarded his chaps and spurs, that he might walk the easier, and buried himself safe from pursuit in the cedar brake.

It was bad enough going at best. Accustomed to the saddle as he was, his feet pinched and bound by high-heeled boots, every step soon became a torture. Ten miles home! Would he ever get there? Soon he had to stop to rest every few yards. The powerful thigh muscles that gripped like steel on the saddle of a bucking horse were now so much extra weight. The muscles he was now using were soft and unaccustomed to the task. Eight more miles to go! Would he get there before night! What horror it would be to stumble over the rough stones through the darkness!

It was ten o'clock when he stumbled exhausted through the door. His father

and Nell were sitting by the fire. The table was still spread, waiting for him. He gulped a cup of hot coffee, and told them what had happened.

His father chuckled in his throat. "Accident, Jeff, was it!" he grunted, "I know purty well what kind o' accident it is when a Bentley kills a Fo'd!"

Jeff gasped, and turned to Nell. "Nell," he demanded, "you believe me, don't you?"

It was a long time before Nell raised her white face. "Jeff," she murmured sadly, "I remember what you said when you stamped out of the house this morning. 'The Fords have started it, and I'm a-goin' to finish it!'"

Jeff stared at her in a daze. His cousin Nell, too! He turned and slowly entered his room, barred the door after him, and cast himself face down on the bed.

He was too exhausted, mentally and physically, to sleep much that night. He arose at the first gray sign of daylight in the east, stuffed some cold meat and biscuits in his pockets, and stole softly from the house. He went quietly to the corrals, and roped one of his horses. He slipped a hackamore on its nose, threw the macarte over its neck, and sprang on it bareback. There was but one thing to do; go back to where his dead horse was, get his saddle and carbine, his chaps and spurs, and leave the country—a fugitive, with every man's hand against him as one who had deliberately shot an old unarmed man in the back. He groaned, and swayed on the horse's back. God! what a thing!

Stiff from the walk of the day before, and unaccustomed as he was to bareback riding, he rode slowly. The sun was high when he had recovered his saddle, and was seated in it again. On the edge of the cedars, he glanced backward over the open country that he might never see again. Just one glance, and he wheeled his horse and raced madly for shelter. A scant three hundred yards away came a group of flying horsemen, the boys from the roundup. He did not need to be told what their intentions were. *A lynching party!*

He dashed toward where he had left his chaps and spurs. Yes, he would stop to get them; he would need them sorely in a flight through the thick, tearing cedars. He saw them ahead of him, but his eyes did not dwell on them long. For beside them lay Slim Tooker on his face, a dark stain spreading over his back telling of how he had died.

Jeff sat his horse an instant in horror, looking at the figure on the ground. At last he came to with a start. He must pick up his chaps and spurs and fly for his life.

Too late! A crashing through the cedars swept upon him. Forgetting his chaps and spurs, he cut his horse with his quirt, and dashed through the trees, an occasional bullet whistling past his head. On he raced, the pursuers seeming to gain with every bound. Just an instant they had hesitated beside the body of Slim; then, with vengeful yells, they swept forward. A piece of the brim of his hat fluttered to his shoulder, balanced there for an instant, and fell to the ground behind him.

Now he was out of sight of them, but they could still follow him easily by the crashing cedar branches where he raced. Riding without chaps, his trousers soon were torn from his legs. His knees were spurting blood. His shirt hung in tatters, and the blood streamed down his torn arms. He wore short gloves, and no leather cuffs to dash the branches aside. *Crash, crash,* came his relentless pursuers. An occasional wild shot *whooshed* over his head, and screamed through the air in its ricochet from a cedar limb. And always the shrill yells.

It was the monotony of those yells that troubled him. How like a running pack of hounds it sounded! He remembered how often he had hunted mountain lions through the cedar-brakes, his hounds dashing ahead of him, sometimes one leading, sometimes another; the others bunched behind seemingly in wild confusion. But always there was the same singleness of purpose—to run their quarry down—that, and nothing more. And somewhere ahead of them was the lion, slipping noiselessly through the cedars, and along the rimrocks; hoping, hoping against hope that the slavering pack would lose the trail. And always the baying, baying!

Was the crashing, growing fainter? Yes, he was gaining! A half hour more and the sound of pursuit was growing dim. And then came the crash. He shot through the air, hands outstretched. He had an instantaneous impression of his horse's legs describing an arc in the air. Then oblivion.

His head was spinning; everything spun. Where was he? Oh, yes! He had been running a maverick when his horse had fallen. He rolled over with a groan, and saw the horse lurching to his feet. No, he had been running a lion! He could hear the pack coming toward him. Then full consciousness flashed back to him. He sprang to his feet, reeled for an instant, threw his hand dizzily to his head, and staggered quickly to his horse. He must go! My God! *The lynching party!*

Again they were at his heels. Again stray shots *whooshed* through the tops of the cedars, and went screaming on. And the shrill yells! This time they were gaining slowly but surely; his horse was stiff from the fall, and afraid to extend itself. If he only had his spurs! Something burned his bare shoulder. No, it had not been a cedar limb! They had caught sight of him. The yelling mounted to a shrill din—hounds running by sight—then sank again. He was temporarily out of their view in the dense cedars.

He came to the end of a long opening in the trees. Ah! He could run fast there; nothing to impede him! His horse lengthened his stride. Jeff, on the impulse of the instant, suddenly threw him to his haunches and wheeled him. Then, with two bounds, he was buried in the cedars near the end of the opening. He sprang to the ground, and held his hat over the horse's nose, to muffle its heavy breathing.

The crashing seemed to engulf him. Louder and louder it grew, seeming to sweep around him in a semicircle. He thrust his hat back on his head and leaped to the saddle. Too late! They were upon him!

"Whee-ee-ee!"
"D'you hear him?"
"He came by here!"
CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!
"There he goes!"
"Here's his trail!"
CRACK! CRACK!
"Yi-u-u-u—ee-ee-ee!"

The hounds had overrun the trail! He tried to remain still until they had gone half way to the end of the opening. He must! Then panic seized him. He dashed his heels against the horse's ribs, and fled madly through the thickest of the cedars, heedless of the clattering of his horse's hoofs, heedless of the crashing of dead limbs as he tore through them.

His noise was drowned in that of the pursuers. Half a mile he raced madly, then drew his horse to a lope. Now he had time to think. They would circle and again pick up his trail, as lion hounds invariably did. He loped steadily across a little rocky wash, and onto a bare, boulder strewn mesa. Here he drew his horse to a slow walk that would leave little or no mark on the hard ground. He circled back to the wash and followed it a mile. Then, striking out in a swinging trot, he turned toward the mountains, riding through a stillness where there were no yells.

At noon he stopped and unsaddled his horse. He ate the cold meat and biscuits, and thanked his good fortune in having brought them. He rolled a cigarette, and leaned back against the cedar. What a mess it was! Never again could he use the name of Bentley. Never again could he look on the faces of those whom he had always thought to be his friends. Whither could he fly? Canada? Simon Ford had always been talking of sending for his son in Kentucky and going there with him. There was more room there, he had heard—thousands of square miles of knee high grass, and not a cow to eat it. They said it was cold there. Snow.

He sat up with a jerk. He must not fall asleep until he had got farther away! Of course he was safe for the time being, but he mustn't fall asleep. Why hadn't he been able to sleep the night before? Yes, Canada would be the best place. If only his sister Nell—But his sister had died long ago. This Nell was his cousin. But what difference did that make? He had made her his sister——

Again the lion hounds were running. They should bay the lion pretty soon. They were circling toward him; he'd better rest his horse until they got nearer.

He jerked himself to his elbow. Up the ridge swept the yelling. But no! This time it really *was* the hounds! He recognized the deep voice of Mose, Ford's leader. And that was little Pie-face. And Major. Yes; Rock and Tip, too! All hope was gone; there were fifteen long eared lion hounds on his trail! If they had been pottering blood-

hounds he, with his fast horse and knowledge of dogs could have evaded them; but fifteen fast lion hounds sweeping upon him with the speed of the wind! They had been trained to run wild horses, so they would not quit the trail until they had encircled him. *How* they ran! His own race was done.

He arose to his feet and reached for his tobacco. Might as well wait for them; no use in killing his horse for nothing. But no! "Hanged if I'll quit!" He winced as the literal truth of that struck him. He'd go as long as he could! He hastily saddled his horse, and sprang to its back. Off through the cedars again he dashed.

But what was the use? The hounds were scarcely five hundred yards behind him now, and running full cry on his warm trail, gaining with every slavering leap! He dashed his horse to its haunches and whirled it in a half circle in its tracks. The last lion he had run had tried that trick; why not he? Back toward the hounds he dashed, along his own trail. As he passed a clump of low bushes, he suddenly brought a rein taut against the side of the horse's neck. The animal, surprised, hesitated for a fraction of a second; then it cleared the bushes with a bound. As he dashed away, he could hear the hounds overrun the trail. Now they were circling in wild confusion. Every note in the ululating din had its meaning to him.

He had gained two hundred yards! Then, a long drawn bay from old Mose; faithful, intelligent old hound. He might wait and shoot old Mose. But no! Not Mose.

The song of the pack was steady again. How he had loved that song! Could he ever hear it again without a shudder? But—would he ever hear another pack in full cry?

A score of deer jumped startled from their bed ground before him, and bounded away in terror of the strange, bloody thing that was bearing down on them. He was tearing over the ground where they had lain, when something flashed to his brain. The trick that had lost him the biggest lion he had ever run! Would it work now? There were many young, half broken dogs in the Ford pack; would old Mose and Major and Pieface default? For the younger dogs he need have no fear.

He wheeled his horse, and dashed after the deer. The ground was torn up by the four score bounding hoofs; the trail was easily followed. Three hundred yards it was plain, then it faded in the rocky ground, where the deer had slowed to a trot. He whirled his horse. The pack was scarcely two hundred yards behind him now; he could hear the yells of the men behind mingling with the baying of the hounds. Was there time?

Scarcely twenty yards he dared to race on his back track. Then, with another bound over a clump of bushes, he dived into the cedars. My God!—the wind! But it chanced to be right: the pack would pass to windward. He could not run now; the men would hear his horse. Again he sprang to the ground and held his hat over his horse's nose.

The frantic baying grew louder rapidly. He listened carefully. Ah! There was now a new note in it, so faint that no one not expecting it would have heard. The hound's first instinct had prevailed over their training. *They were running the deer!*

By him swept the pack. Peering through the bushes, he could see the whipping ears, the noses ploughing the earth till they were raw and torn, the slavering jaws, the flailing, bleeding tails. He tensed and leaned forward. The music of the pack!

He shrank back into the concealing cedars again. But there was no need; the men were riding furiously, all eyes fixed ahead, where the hounds had gone. He was safe!

He turned his tired horse, and started toward home, riding slowly. And slow riding it was, indeed! He had now to circle every outstretched twig which might brush his torn knees or arms. For an hour he progressed painfully through the cedar brake. Then a fortunate thought came to him. He dismounted, removed the heavy Navajo blanket from under his saddle, cut it in two, and tied the pieces around his knees. This made his progress much easier, but still he did not try to force his jaded horse faster than a walk; he did not want to reach the ranch before darkness.

For the first time he realized how far his wild dash had brought him. But it was still early, and his slow gait would bring him home by moonrise. A quail whirred up from before his horse. His

hand never left the saddle horn. He was cured of random shooting.

Glancing down at the place where the quail had lain, he suddenly started. The pallid face of a gray bearded old man was staring blankly up at him. He brushed his hand across his eyes, and looked again. Nothing there but a little tuft of straggling weeds. But could he ever escape that haunting face? Of course it had been an accident; but, still, it was the bullet from his gun that had killed old Simon Ford. Why did such things happen?

Yes, he would ride home. It was safe to do so now that the pursuers were far off the track. They would follow the hounds miles before they discovered that they were running deer, and then would not know where they had left his trail. More likely, they would lose hearing of the pack in the rough country into which the deer undoubtedly would head once they discovered that they were being run. At any rate, the men would take it for granted that he had continued on to the mountains for which he had been heading.

He could say goodby to his father, and the boys at the bunkhouse; probably they were all back from the round-up by this time. And his cousin, who had taken the place of his dead sister, whom she so much resembled. If only Nell had believed him, how much easier his punishment would be to bear. But —but she had given a green silk handkerchief to Dave Cole, Ford's hired gunman! What could it mean? Could Cole be trying to make a fool of the girl?

The full moon was an hour high when he entered the clearing at the ranch. It was almost as bright as day, the houses and corrals stood silhouetted in brilliant relief against the dark background of the cedars beyond. As he passed the bunkhouse, he noticed that there was no light there; the boys were not back yet. But two of his best saddle horses were in the corrals, and the two best pack mules on the ranch. His father was expecting him back; these sudden flights were nothing new to him.

If he'd only believe the truth! But what difference did it make? For him, a Bentley's hatred of a Ford was as natural and immutable as a panther's antipathy to a wolf.

He whistled softly as he came to the garden gate. His father was quick on the trigger; it would be well to warn him. Instantly the door flew open, and he could see Nell silhouetted against the light. Beyond her he could see his bed neatly rolled in its tarp, and the two loaded kyaks leaning against the wall. Everything was ready to load on the pack mules. He threw the gate open and stepped toward the house.

"Back, son?" greeted the old man, hobbling to the door on his heavy stick. "We-all got the kyaks loaded an' yo' bed rolled. We got Kit an' Tobe in the corral, an' yo' two top horses. When yo' reckonin' on stahtin'?"

Jeff slumped dully into a chair. In what a matter-of-fact way his father took his forced flight!

"I don't know, Dad," he murmured, staring into the dancing fire. "Don't you reckon I'd better be goin' right now?"

He related the incidents of the day. His father chuckled, and pounded the flags of the hearth with his stick, when told of how Jeff had eluded his pursuers.

"Neveh yet saw a Bentley couldn't get away f'um the law. Sho! We've had lots o' practice!"

Jeff shook his head dazedly. He once had held the same ideas that his father held now—still would have held them, but that Providence had transplanted him to a country where minds were broader and hearts bigger. He slowly raised his eyes to Nell, who was staring expressionlessly into the glowing coals. She felt his gaze upon her, and slowly raised her head. He gazed deep in his cousin's eyes, and saw something there that brought the first gleam of relief to his.

"Nell! Don't you reckon—? Don't you believe?"

She wanly tried to smile. "No, Jeff, I don't! I know you didn't kill him. When you told me last night what had happened, it—it took me by surprise. I didn't have time to think. These killings were so common back home! When I had time to think, Jeff, I knew you didn't do it; you couldn't have!"

Old Jeff chuckled, and winked senilely at Jeff. The latter flushed, and started to turn away, but Nell's hand fell on his shoulder. She shook him roughly, and, with a brave attempt to smile, spoke in the dialect of the ranges. "Jeff, yore

cousin's a-stickin' with you through hell fire!"

"An' why shouldn't she?" snorted Old Jeff, contemptuously. "Don't you-all reckon yo' can git yo' rest tonight, an' git a soon staht in the mo'nin'?"

"I—I reckon I can. They ain't likely to git here before daylight, an' I can start before that."

"Then, I'm a-goin' to bed. Wake me befo' you-all goes. I'll git up if the's anythin' you want me to do; but I don't reckon I'll have to." He picked up his stick and hobbled unconcernedly to his room.

For a long time Jeff and Nell sat in silence. How much easier he felt now when he knew that in his cousin he had one who believed in him. Perhaps he could go to Canada, locate a good spot for a ranch, and write his father and Nell to sell out and move there. And after that,——.

"I wish," Nell's murmur interrupted his thoughts, "that we would end the trouble for good and all, could really be friends with the Fords! Wouldn't that be just fine, to be friends with them, real friends? That would be Christian. We ain't neither of us very religious, Jeff, but we want to live Christian."

"You never were like the rest o' the women back there in the mountains, Nell. Most of 'em are worse than the men; they jest seem to like the smell of blood! But the Fords all were just nachelly bloodthirsty. Can't say as I want to be friends with 'em, anyhow; I jest want 'em to leave us alone, an' we leave them alone."

"That's what the Fords say of the Bentleys; that *we're* bloodthirsty!"

Jeff started. He thought a long time, then a smile came slowly to his lips. "Yo're right!" he grinned, "I thought I was over the old fashioned ideas years ago, but I'm jest now beginnin' to think that, after all, maybe a Ford's jest as good as a Bentley in the end. Somehow, when old Simon died, he looked at me kind o' queer—like he was seein' things he never saw before. An' I kind o' saw 'em too; only it's just now that I'm beginnin' to understand them."

Nell placed her hands on his shoulders. "Oh, Jeff, you dear wild brother of mine! I've been waitin' years for you to get plumb over your oldfashioned ideas, and now you're about over 'em at last, or you wouldn't have seen those things, or understood them. Do you know, I think Dave Ford was really more civilized than you?"

"Huh! You seem to have thought a whole lot of Dave Ford—for a Bentley!"

"Honestly, I did, Jeff. He was the nicest little boy I ever saw." There was a peculiar note in her voice as of something unsaid; but the man did not notice—as a jealous lover surely would have noticed.

Jeff shook his head, and changed the subject. "How much hay did the horses in the corral have?"

"Not much. We figured you'd want to start again as soon as you got here."

"Reckon I'll jest run out an' give 'em a little more. They'll have a hard day ahead of them tomorrow." He reached for his hat and gun belt, and started toward the door.

Nell followed him, and thrust his rifle into his hand. "No use taking chances, Jeff. You never know from now on what'll happen, until you get clean out of the country."

He threw a few armfuls of hay to the horses and mules, and hastily turned toward the house. He'd have to get to bed and get what rest he could; no telling what might happen on the morrow. Nell was standing in the doorway as he swung over the top bar of the corral, not waiting to go to the gate. Somehow, he had a feeling that something was wrong, a feeling that had suddenly come over him, such as one feels under the gaze of concealed eyes. He glanced to the cloudless sky. How bright the moon shone! Almost as bright as day, but for the heavy, brooding shadows under the cedars. He opened the gate in the low garden fence, and hurried up the path toward the house.

"Stick 'em up, Jeff!"

He started to run toward the open door. He felt the wind of a bullet whistling past his ear. The dust spurted up in front of him. He heard the thud of lead through the heavy door. And Nell was still standing there! He stopped, dropped his carbine, and raised his hands above his head.

From the dense shadows of the cedars came men afoot, with jingling spurs telling of their concealed horses; men with carbines, some with rifles, and some with rusty shotguns which they had

picked up hastily at the Ford ranch—rusty shotguns, ready to spit forth their streams of mangling buckshot, ready and too willing.

Dave Cole leered in his captive's face. "Thought we was fools, did ye, Jeff! Thought we couldn't tell that the houn's had broke off afteh deer, an' come back an' watch the house!"

Someone jerked Jeff's gun away; he could feel the tug at his hip. His hands were bound behind his back, with Dave Cole's large neckkerchief. The night air was chill. Dave ran his hand over his bare neck a time or two, and, reaching in his hip pocket, produced a small silk handkerchief to cover it,—a green silk handkerchief with a narrow red border. Solemnly, evilly, he winked at Young Jeff Bentley, as he adjusted the folds to ward off the night breeze.

Nell was there. She had been staring white faced at Jeff from the beginning, but just for an instant her gaze had shifted to Jeff's enemy—just for an instant, after he had removed the large neckerchief. Then her eyes traveled unseeingly over the moonlight covered mountains. Suddenly she whirled back to Dave.

"Dave," she whispered, *"Dave Ford,* I want to talk to you! Come out here with me." None but Jeff had heard, and none but he noticed as she quietly led Dave away.

So that was it! Nell was a traitor to her family, a Judas who had betrayed her cousin! She had allied herself with the enemy. Probably she had signaled from the house that he, Jeff, had returned. Rough hands now were leading Jeff toward the tall cottonwood at the foot of the garden. A rope already had been thrown over a high limb, and a horse was being led up, his cinch tightened to withstand the pull of the rope. But what did it matter? Jeff stood with his head erect, like a bayed cougar, defiantly eyeing the determined crowd that surrounded him.

It was unlike the usual lynching mob; there were none of the howls, the pushing, the open blood lust, the eagerness to see the form swinging in the air. There were no guns ready to finish the work of the noose. It was just a crowd of quiet, determined cowboys—determined that the law of the range should be enforced to the full. Not one was there but Dave who did not hate his job, scarcely one who could look Jeff in the eye. But they were all the more determined for that, all the more implacable.

The hands that placed the rope on Jeff's neck were gentle, almost tender, but they never faltered. Jeff, Young Jeff Bentley, who had so often ridden the range with them, had, unaccountably, shot an old, unarmed man in the back. He must pay the penalty. A brown, hawk nosed man from the 3 X had mounted the waiting horse, and was tying the rope to the saddle horn, tying it slowly and sadly—and firmly. His spurs touched the horse, and the rope tightened.

Then came a piercing s h r i e k. Through the crowd came Nell, flying, arms outstretched, white faced. Her coolness had deserted her, and her distended, horror-struck eyes told of approaching hysteria. Before anyone could stop her, her hands had grasped the rope above Jeff's neck, and she swung there, her toes barely touching the ground. The man from the 3 X quickly whirled the horse, slacking the rope, and lowering her to the ground, where she reeled, still clutching the loosened rope. The men were nonplussed.

It was Jeff himself who took command. "Boys," his tone was sad but firm, "take her to the house, and don't let her watch; don't let her see it. Good-bye, Nell." He shook his head dazedly as gentle but firm hands led her away. He could not understand her. Had she been begging Dave for his life?

"Wait a minute, boys!" Dave interrupted, grinning. He pushed close to Jeff. Then his laugh rang out, as he rolled a cigarette—a wild, reckless laugh.

"Jeff," Dave lighted his cigarette, gazing quizzically over his cupped hands at his feudal enemy, and blew a puff of smoke slowly in the air, "Jeff, yo' got *nerve,* ain't yo'?"

"Shore! Didn't you know I was a Bentley? If we're a-goin' to stand here talkin' all night, someone loose my hands an' give me a cigarette." Jeff grinned broadly, although it nearly killed him to do so. He must hide the fact that he felt weak, dazed, and sick!

A knife flashed in the moonlight, and cut the neckerchief that bound his arms behind him. Dave again pulled from his shirt pocket the sack of tobacco, and

tablet of brown papers. He handed them to Jeff.

"Take Dave away," someone interrupted quietly, "He must be drunk."

"Wait a minute, boys, till I get my tobacco back."

Again Dave looked quizzically at Jeff, who was rolling a cigarette with a steady hand, not spilling a grain of tobacco.

"*Damme!*" he exclaimed, bringing his hand down heavily on Jeff's shoulder, "Yo' all man, Bentley or no Bentley!"

Hands grasped his arms to lead him away, but he shook them off. "Wait a minute, boys!" He again looked approvingly toward Jeff, "I'm kinda beginnin' to figgeh Jeff heah's too good a man to hang, even if he *is* a Bentley."

"Take Dave away!" It was a loud growl this time.

"Wait a minute, boys!" Again he shook the hands off. "I know something of the killin' you might like to know befo' yo' go ahead with the job."

The cowboys paused. "Well, tell it quick," someone exclaimed quietly.

"Well, in the first place, I'll have to tell you that I'm Dave Fo'd, an' ol' Simon was my dad. I cut up a Bentley back in Kentucky, an' thought he was a-goin' to die, so I had to quit the country, an' change my name. But I heerd yeste'day that he's able to be about ag'in."

"What has that got to do with the killin'?" someone asked.

"Nothin', but that I was jest a-goin' to let you-all hang Jeff heah jest because he was a Bentley, although I knew he didn't do the killin' at all. But I couldn't go through with it! He's too good a man to hang, Bentley or no Bentley!"

Jeff started, and turned quickly to Dave.

"Yes, Jeff, I know yo' think you did it, an' that I'm lyin'. Mebbe yo' think Nell talked me into gittin' yo' out of this, but she couldn't do that. Lord knows she tried hard enough! It's jest that I see yo' all man, Jeff; yo're gittin' yo'self out of it."

"But who—" Jeff seemed dazed, "who killed him?"

"Slim Tooker did, the dirty little snake! He done it! I'll tell yo'-all how it was."

"*Slim Tooker!*"

The crowd milled around uncertainly. Was Dave crazy?

"But," someone asked, "wasn't Slim with yo' when you found Simon?"

"Sho' he was, the dirty little skunk! He shot him, an' then circled around in the cedars till he met me an' rode back as if nothin' had happened. He stopped to tighten his cinch jest befo' I saw Jeff; wanted me to go on ahead alone an' see his dirty work!"

"But why—what did he kill him for?"

"Because Dad had jest fired him fo' stahtin' to shoot Jeff in the back in town. I'll tell you what happened. Jest afteh I saw Jeff, Slim caught up with me while I was standin' the' with my gun out. He rode beside me till we come to—Dad. We figgered he was dead, but I thought I saw him move a little. Slim didn't see that. I jumped off'n my hoss an' yelled to Slim to run the rim an' git Jeff. Of course I thought that Jeff had shot him."

"He was alive!" gasped Jeff in amazement.

"He was putty nigh dead, but afteh I give him a drink o' whisky he come to enough to tell me what had happened. Jest as he sta'ted in to talk, I saw Slim comin' back around the cedars. He saw him talkin' to me, an' wheeled his horse an' ran, knowin' that I'd heah the truth."

"An' *you* got Slim!"

"I did that! He stahted foh the point o' the cedah brake, jest as Jeff done, as it was the nearest coveh. I emptied my ca'bine afteh him from the rim. I think it was the last shot that got him, as I saw him reel in the saddle just as he struck the cedars. He went quite a ways befo' he fell; the horse was a-goin' fast."

The crowd was melting. Most of the boys rode away in shamefaced silence, wondering if they could ever again look Jeff in the eye. A few paused to press his hand hastily, and, eyes to the ground, mumble unintelligible things, before they too disappeared softly in the cedars. Only Jeff, Dave Ford, and Nell were left standing in the moonlight beneath the big cottonwood. Old Jeff was still bound in the ranch-house, as he had been since his son's surrender; no one had thought of him. Dave started toward his horse, but Jeff called him back.

"Dave," he started toward him, "let's shake hands before you go."

Dave started to stretch out his hand, but hesitated, then quickly thrust it behind his back.

"Sorry, Jeff, but I neveh shook han's with a Bentley."

"Didn't you, Dave?" There was a curious quality in Nell's voice that made Dave redden. His face relaxed as he again thrust his hand forward, to grasp firmly that of Jeff.

"One thing, Jeff—" Dave hesitated slightly, "One thing, Jeff, I got to say is that I neveh shook han's with a man with mo' backbone than yo' got."

Jeff could bear blows more easily than compliments. He reddened, and shifted his feet uneasily. But he had to say something. "I—you—Dave, won't yo' come over for dinner some time when yo're ridin' the range near here?"

"Thanks, I might." His accents said plainly that he wouldn't. But he had to return the compliment; had to show some manners.

"Yo' a-goin' oveh afteh the strays to-morrow, I reckon. Won't yo' come in fo' dinneh with me at the ranch, 'stead o' eatin' at the chuck wagon? An'—an' Miss Nell, too; bring her along."

Of course Dave knew they wouldn't come; weren't they Bentleys! Then came the bombshell.

"I'll be there! An' Nell; I kinda figger she'll come without much bringin'." The corners of Jeff's mouth twisted just a trifle.

Dave paused for an instant, then, with a puzzled "Goodby," rode slowly into the cedars. They did things in queer, heathen ways in Arizona; he couldn't understand it. But somehow, he was getting new ways of looking at things since he had come West. And his father had said queer things when he was dying; perhaps he was right. Weren't the Fords and Bentleys going to fight any more? Were the laws of nature upset? Well, they were coming for dinner, and he had to show proper hospitality—to Bentleys! Would Nell like fried calf brains? He wished he were a better cook. Perhaps if he and Nell—. But he was not yet prepared for such revolutionary thoughts. He cut his horse with the quirt, and disappeared quickly over the moonlit ridge. And it was not until then that Nell turned to follow her cousin to the house.

next issue—

TWO DROPS OF BLOOD

By

H. Bedford-Jones

a grim tale of snowland, and a double stain

BACKFIRE

By

Wilbur Hall

the dreaded day, when fire came to the redwoods

and the big complete novel—

CROOK'S TOUR

By

Frederick J. Jackson

a chuckle and a thrill on every page

DISHPAN MESS CALL

THE old war dogs used to say, "The army travels on its belly!"

The old cowpuncher puts it, "The roundup travels in the chuck wagon, an' Gawd help cookie if he frys the flapjacks in mutton taller, gits gravel in the beans or puts *too much tobaccer* in the coffee."

Even today, with the range a checkerboard of fences, there are a few who can remember——

The cold of early dawn, with the moon round and golden, reddening as it dips through a blue wall, sinking behind the angry silhouette of the silent hills. The coyotes yap, and whine mournfully; and every clump of sage, every boulder shelters a painted redman, perchance.

The chuck fire burns merrily. Sleepy punchers crowd about it waiting for that call:

"COME AN' GET IT, BOYS!"

When the dawn slipped o'er the prairie,
In them roundup days of old,
Chuck fires then seemed twice as merry,
Fer us night herd boys was cold!
Waitin' by the ole chuck wagon,
There was music in the noise
Of the range cook's bangin' kettle,
An' his, "Come an' get it, boys!"

Once, a longhorned southland critter,
('Twas a 'Heart-an'-clover-loop')
Charged at cookie's big, black kettle,
Where he stood a-stirrin' soup!
Cookie stunned him with the ladle,
Never movin' from the spot;
Stirred the soup once more, then hollered,
"Come an' get it, while it's hot!"

Then, while we was brandin' cattle
On the ole Wyoming line,
Come the sudden crash of battle,
An' the Ute's war arrow's whine!
Spoon in one hand, gun in other,
Cookie matched 'em shot fer shot!
Drove 'em off, then died a-whisp'rin',
"Come an' get it, while it's hot!"

Betcha, when Ole Sky-Boss calls me,
To a range that's free an' wide;
Where the cattle graze by thousands,
An' there ain't no Great Divide;
Betcha, pard, I sees the dust clouds
Floatin' o'er the roundup's noise,
Bet I'll hear the range cook yellin',
"Hi-yu! Come an' get it, boys!"

—*Ben A. Miller.*

DRAWING THE STRONG BOW

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER, whose "Twisted Bars" appears in this number, tells of himself and how he recently enjoyed a "needed rest." Prob'ly this feller sleeps while punchin' a bag!

"Have been on a wild vacation letting my hand get well, and taking a needed rest. Went to Reno, Nevada, shot jackrabbits with bow and arrow all through western Nevada, went through the flat woods country of Modoc County down into Montague, Yreka and into the Flying M ranch, where we outfitted, and went into the headwaters of Desolation Creek, where we hunted deer with bow and arrow.

"Returning home my companion stated he had always desired to see the Tonto Basin country of Arizona, and I had a hankering to see the Mogollon Mesa district, so we swung out into the Mojave Desert, crossed into Arizona, climbed seven thousand feet and got into rainstorms, snowstorms, cloudbursts, fogs and other forms of moisture. We emerged dripping and mud spattered at Phoenix, after coming out the Black Canyon road from Prescott, saw some blue sky to the southwest, and followed it into Mexicali, where we decided to go down into Old Mexico for a quail hunt with bow and arrow.

"We shot all forms of small game with bow and arrow, and had lots of fun. One of the things I got a kick out of was trying to inveigle an Apache Indian into pulling our eighty pound 'war bow.' The redskins shot about a twenty-eight pounder with a single finger and thumb release, and one crack at our artillery was too much for the buck. He watched me pull it once and his eyes stuck out as far as his chin. He walked away talking to himself. It was more bow than he'd ever seen.

"Several roughneck garagemen were inclined to look upon our bows as an effeminate mark of urban decadence, and, after a few pulls of the eighty pounder I'd pass it on to them with the casual comment that it was one of the ladies' target bows. The ensuing few minutes were always worth watching. It takes some specially developed muscles to pull an eighty pounder, and there's a knack to it. A man has to pull his right hand to the jaw. If he tries to pull it to the center of the chest as most of 'em do he couldn't bend it if he were a Samson—the muscles just ain't made that way. Of course we didn't tell 'em any of this, but looked on condescendingly while they strained all their muscles and pulled the bow about halfway, usually commenting on the fact that they weren't feeling well that day.

"Erle Stanley Gardner."

WARM LION MEAT

JAY LUCAS, a professional lion hunter, and a writer whose Western stories have attained an enviable popularity, presents in this issue his first offering to readers of WEST, "When Man Meets Man." Instead of an autobiographical tale of his more than colorful personality as introduction, Mr. Lucas has allowed us the use of a graphic letter written by him to a New York business man.

Mr. W. Louis Johnson, Eastern Division Manager of the Hoover Company, also granting permission for the use of the letter, speaks most highly of Jay Lucas as a man and a friend. The letter:

My dear Mr. Johnson:

The weather up to now has been extraordinary, in that it has been too dry for good trailing, but nothing short of ideal for any other purpose. It has been quite cold, but very clear and still. The sunsets have been the most wonderful I ever saw in my life. Many evenings I have almost frozen, watching them from a hilltop.

I should like to "go out" for Christmas, but cannot do so unless I have my range cleared of lions; business before pleasure. Lions eat just as many colts and calves at Christmas as any other time; and the cowmen cuss me just as heartily then as ever, if I allow the lions to live too long on my hunting range. Perhaps, if my hounds run well, I can get away by New Year's.

There were more bears around this fall than I ever saw before. As they were here very late, they must have holed up somewhere in the canyons. I have worked out a good plan to catch them when they come out in spring:

I shall get a number of the smallest size bear traps. Now, these small traps will not hold a large bear, particularly a grizzly, if tied to heavy drags in the usual manner, so I shall just attach to them lengths of heavy log chain with no drags.

When I catch a bear, I can take his trail with my hounds; he cannot go very far in one night, and cannot run in the usual manner when my hounds overtake him next morning. I am trying to convince myself that my reason for working this scheme is because the small traps are cheaper and lighter to carry than the larger ones; but to be quite honest with myself I must admit that what I really want is the fun of trailing him, and the excitement of finding him at comparative liberty when I overtake him. I dare say it shall be exciting enough, with perhaps a little excitement to spare. You can well judge what a grizzly's frame of mind is likely to be after he has had his paw in a toothed trap all night. Grizzlies predominate here as a rule, but there seemed to be more blacks and cinnamons around this year. One big cinnamon made tracks in the mud around Tule shortly after you left, just after a rain.

Day before yesterday two cowboys arrived at my camp (Old Bar Cross, two miles from Tule) and decided to stay all night. Yesterday morning, just as I was calling my hounds to hunt Cedar Canyon, they remembered that they had some mail for me; this mail consisting of your letter and Mr. H—'s. As I was in a hurry I put the letters in my pocket to read later on. About an hour later, as I was riding through what the cowboys call the yew thicket, but really a thicket of Arizona cypress, I started to read them. Just as I finished reading, my hounds, which had been following at heel, suddenly rent the heavens with a series of ear splitting bays, and dashed by me under my horse any way to get ahead.

Now I knew very well that such frenzy on the part of Moses, Major & Company could mean only one thing—lion! I thrust the letters in my pocket, and dashed after them. Some way on I saw the track of a huge lion in their trail.

The hunt wasn't exciting, as lion hunts go. In about two hours I heard them barking a tree in a little side canyon, and climbed down. They had treed a small female lion (seven

foot, eight) which showed no disposition to jump out or otherwise give trouble. I approached close to her, and shot her in the most approved manner—in the "sticking-place," so that the bullet would make only one hole, and that where I should cut in skinning her.

I began to sharpen my knife, when suddenly a thought occurred to me. How could a small female lion forge the track of a huge Tom? I decided that it couldn't be done, so, after considering the matter a while, I took my dogs and walked in a circle of about fifty yards around her; that is, I started to walk in a circle, but completed only a small segment. My dogs "left the world" as our idiom has it, and I almost broke my neck getting back to my horse so as to be able to stay within hearing of them.

They had the trail of the big Tom, the mate of the she I had killed. We found that he had gone out on a bluff and watched us kill his mate, and then suddenly decided that he had pressing business in Utah—and started as though he had decided to get there before night.

His first trick was to run for the roughest country around, which, need I tell you, was very rough indeed. Here I had to leave my horse and follow him afoot. He climbed up or down every bluff he could find; the hounds could not get near enough to tree him. After about three hours I saw the quarry, trotting along about a half mile ahead of the dogs. I emptied my rifle at him, but the range was too great, and I did not touch him. Two hours more of running and baying, and I again emptied my rifle at him at long range—again without effect.

About an hour after I saw him last my hounds got out of hearing. I had lost all hope of treeing him. I was tired, footsore, hungry, and disgusted, as I pushed on, trying to hear the hounds again. At last I decided that they had become exhausted and quit the trail; this, you must remember, was their second run in one day.

A little before sunset I gave up all hope. I was in the bottom of a very deep canyon where one had to crane one's neck to see the sky. My problem now was whether to go back to my horse and go home, or to drop in my tracks and sleep all night. Fatigue said "sleep"; hunger said "supper." Hunger won! I started up the bed of the canyon, thinking how pleasant was the lot of a grocery clerk or street cleaner, who did not have to run after a pack of squalling hounds until he was nearly dead of exhaustion, and had three square meals every day.

Suddenly, from a little side canyon that resembled a very narrow blind alley between twenty-story buildings, came a sound. It might have been the baying of a particularly huge and ferocious bloodhound as he tore a criminal to pieces, but I knew it to be little black-and-white Major telling a lion what he would do to him if he would come down out of the tree and fight like a man. The hounds were within two hundred yards of me, but the peculiar shape of the canyon walls had kept the sound of their baying from reaching me.

The lion was in a tall cypress, but had deigned to climb only a scant six feet from the ground, to the first limb. There he sat unconcernedly, scarcely noticing the little hounds that would scarcely have made him a meal. When he saw me, however, he suddenly remembered what had happened to his mate, and started to jump out. A pot shot at long distance passed just under the skin of his right side, tearing the shoulder blade loose, and breaking several ribs. He jumped over a bluff, and out of sight, the hounds after him full cry.

I ran a short distance, and saw him limping along a ledge. Just as I saw him, he began to stagger. I was going to wait a minute or two to let him die, but the hounds were coming behind him, and I knew that if they reached him while he had life left I should lose a hound or two, so I shot him through the heart. He fell over a high bluff, and before I could reach him the hounds had ripped a hole in his flank and torn part out of his entrails. A few seconds more and they would have ruined the hide.

As nearly as I could measure him with a twenty-four inch rifle barrel, he measured nine feet five inches, and was by far the heaviest lion I had ever killed. He had a hump of muscle on the back of his neck more like a grizzly bear than a lion; his forearms, too, resembled those of a bear.

I skinned him, fed my dogs, and, with the skin on my back, returned to my horse. Then, for the first time, I realized a very curious thing; I wasn't the least bit tired! Strange, isn't it, what a stimulant excitement is?

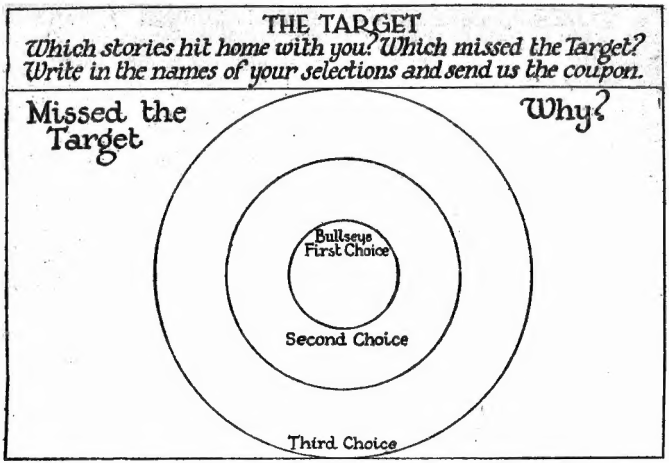
My dogs' feet are swollen to twice normal size, so that they cannot hunt for several days. Today I rode around with them, and discovered that there are three more lions on my range. No rest for the wicked or for the professional hunter! I would tell you that I am going to give up hunting and seek work in the towns but that you might possibly believe me. I sometimes tell the cowboys that when I want to see them laugh heartily. They, like me, know that one cannot break away so easily from the mountains and forests. Still, their lot is easier than mine. They have to average perhaps fourteen hours a day in the saddle. Who but the hunter has to run afoot from before dawn to dark, and sometimes far into the night? No wonder I can put my hatband around my waist! Still, I would not go back to my old trade of cowpunching; I have heard the call of the pack.

Jay Lucas.

THE CHUCK WAGON

BEAR paws 'n' doughgods! Idaho bakes with salt! Pies 'n' 'lasses layered beans! Salt pork 'n' rare steaks! Black java steamin' hot!

If it's grub yuh want, waddies, sink yore teeth in this! I'd call it chuck for kings, only them pore king fellers didn't have no appetites. They'd get outside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a half a hummin' bird's tongue an' the aig of a puny li'l caviar—an' *then* get dyspepsy! This here chuck's meant for *men!*

The next issue begins with a yarn guaranteed to keep any reader thrilled and chuckling all evening. It is "Crook's Tour," a complete novel by Frederick J. Jackson. Incidentally, this is the début in WEST of Jackson's rollicking cowboy redhead, Slivers Cassidy—a fightin' fool. Slivers is the nervy hombre who wins $225,000 in gold at stud poker in one of the greatest card games we've ever met in fiction.

The third strenuous part of William H. Hamby's Utah copper mine serial, takes Lafe Jason into a series of breath taking situations; if you haven't tackled this story start it right now. It's really worth the price of the magazine in itself.

H. Bedford-Jones, a writer deservedly popular with all lovers of adventure fiction, offers a grim story of the wintry Northwest, "Two Drops of Blood." Wilbur Hall, whose stories of the Far West are held in high esteem by readers and editors alike, contributes a dramatic tale of a fire which menaced the California redwood forests, "Backfire." Raymond S. Spears, whose complete novel in our opening issue was so warmly commended, tells a tale of a modern ranchman who did not believe in paying his help; "Paper Wads," is the title. Murray Leinster gives the humor, tragedy and purpose of a wanted bandit, in "Sonny." And lastly, Romaine H. Lowdermilk offers one of the most novel Westerns we've ever read. We refuse to spoil it by saying more, but the name is "The Bee Sting Cure."

Withal, an issue of which we're proud.

THE TARGET RANGE

THE premier number of WEST has not been out long enough to allow the sending in of any Target Coupons; but we're hardly able to wait to see them. What *will* that first coupon be like? Will it be a kick or a boost; and which stories will be chosen as the best?

In this department, as is the practice on both SHORT STORIES and THE FRONTIER, we will print letters from readers, criticisms favorable and unfavorable, and suggestions for the improvement of the magazine. So, reader friends, if you can spare the time to amplify your Target Coupon views, please believe us that your letter will be welcomed in the warmest fashion.

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at a saving of $140.75 over the limited Autographed Sun Dial Edition

MOST bookish people have heard of the famous Sun Dial Edition of Conrad. The great novelist autographed it, and wrote a special preface to each one of the twenty-four volumes. The sets sold for $175.75 each, and 735 wealthy book-collectors paid a total sum of $129,176.25 for this edition.

The new Inclusive Edition, offered here, is printed from the same style and size of type as the Sun Dial Edition. It contains the same fascinating special prefaces by Conrad. But instead of selling for $175.75 cash, like the autographed Sun Dial Edition, *its price is only* $35.00 and even this sum may be paid in convenient small amounts, if desired.

For those who want to own Conrad complete and what intelligent book-lover does not? this is the best opportunity ever presented.

"Romance is Dead, Not Conrad"

The story of Conrad is one of the most amazing in the annals of literature. For thirty years he traveled up and down the Seven Seas. He did not speak English until past twenty. He had never written a line before he was forty. Yet, the world's most famous authors ultimately paid homage to him as the greatest of them all; his original manuscripts, at an auction before his death, sold for $110,998 (probably no such tribute had ever been paid to an author while he was still alive.)

"Romance is dead now, not Conrad," one woman wrote when she heard of his death. It expressed beautifully how thousands felt about the passing of this great Master.

The Secret of Conrad

The secret of Conrad's fascination lies above all in the exciting narratives he had to tell. No one could ever tell a story like Conrad, and no one has ever had such tales to tell. He himself had met these men he wrote about—the riffraff of the world thrown up in the mysterious East—outcasts, adventurers, sailors, rough traders, thieves, murderers.

He had met, too, these strange and ever bewitching women who move through his pages. They were real people, all of them; he knew their lives, their "stories." And what breathless narratives they are! "Such tales as men tell under the haunting stars"—that, in a phrase, typifies them.

Sent for Examination

One of the truest things ever said of Conrad was the comment of Gouverneur Morris. It is among those in the panel at the right. No one who professes to appreciate good literature can afford not to be familiar with *every one* of his great novels.

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Christopher Morley

In all his novels there is a harmony of tone absolutely orchestral in effect.
Joseph Hergesheimer

There is no one like him; there is no one remotely like him.
H. L. Mencken

To stand in a summer-stifled, man-smelling city street and to feel suddenly a fresh salt wind from the far-off pastures of the sea—this is a sensation when one comes upon a book by Joseph Conrad.
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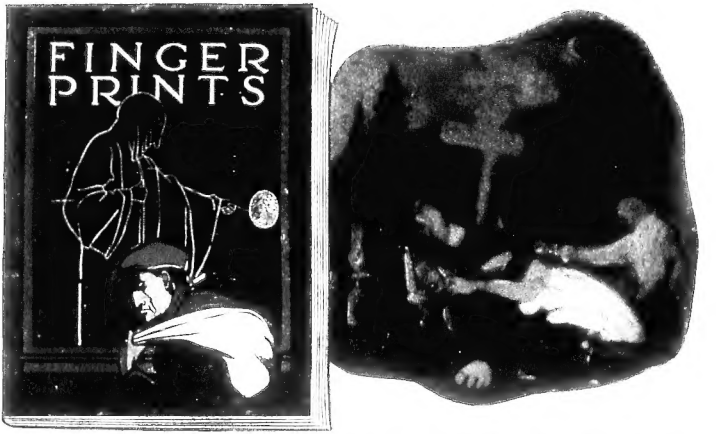

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